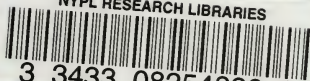


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The OTHER MILLER GIRL



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THE OTHER MILLER GIRL

BOUNCING BET

THE JANUARY GIRL

ROSEMARY GREENAWAY

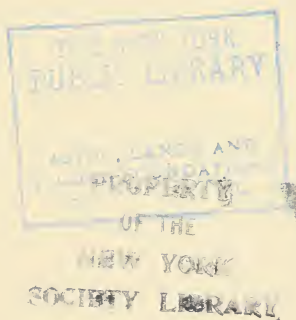
RUSTY MILLER

ELSIE MARLEY, HONEY

KATHLEEN'S PROBATION

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

THE OTHER MILLER GIRL





"I am so sorry . . . but we don't have company, you know."

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THE OTHER MILLER GIRL

BY
JOSLYN GRAY

L.C.

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1922
MR 5



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APR 24 1922

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TO

FLORENCE TEMPLETON GRAY

JANUARY 31, 1922

IN MEMORY OF TODDIE

AND THE DAYS BEFORE THE BIRTHDAY

ON WHICH SHE WAS BANISHED

102170

ILLUSTRATIONS

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know" *Frontispiece*

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THE OTHER MILLER GIRL

CHAPTER I

ON a pleasant Saturday afternoon of the latter part of the September following the awarding of the Wadsworth prize, Mr. Langley received three distinct shocks. The first was occasioned by hearing Miss Penny referred to as an old lady, and the second, which was almost simultaneous, by learning that Anna Miller was commonly known as the 'other Miller girl.' The third, which was more subtle, was also more personal and might have wrought real havoc but for the slip of a yellow-haired girl who was characterised thus negatively. Her discovery of this third shock to Mr. Langley and the action she took led to such consequences that if it were the fashion now-a-days to invoke the muse, this history must needs begin by bidding the goddess sing of the uncommon sense of the other Miller girl.

The church at Farleigh was a really beautiful building. It was only an old-fashioned New England meeting-house, but its proportions were perfect for its style and its pillared portico was almost as appropriate to its structure and environment as the chaste

marble columns of Greece to their more artistic and romantic setting. It stood on an height truncated by natural forces to form a plateau and was surrounded by broad lawns shaded by great English elms and a single oak-tree.

The greensward was as rich and velvety as if the season had been midsummer and the foliage of the trees as luxuriant and almost as bright, on this Saturday afternoon of the third week of September when the minister sauntered slowly up the broad walk leading to the porch. For the summer had been wet: more than one week had disproved the old saying that there will always be one fair day in the six to dry the parson's shirt. It had been favourable for grass and trees and uncultivated vegetation but too rainy for crops. The September sunshine was, however, making amends; and as he glanced at the picturesque regularity of the fenced and walled fields of a farm across the river, Mr. Langley said to himself that the harvest would be bountiful after all if the frosts held off a bare fortnight.

The choir had been rehearsing for the morrow and the women members were lingering in the porch to chat. The minister had just noticed that Miss Garland, a member who had been away on a visit in the West for three months or more, had returned, when he heard her ask who was staying with old Miss Penny this winter. It gave him a start to hear Miss Penny called old, though she hadn't been a young woman when he had come to the two villages straight

from theological school, and if he had stopped to reckon the years he must have realised that she was well beyond three score and ten. But he did not stop, for Miss Harriman's reply gave him another start.

"The other Miller girl," she said in her high, strong voice which fortunately lost its nasal twang when she sang. "Rusty has gone to college, you know, even though she didn't get the Wadsworth prize. But this girl goes to the academy and it seems to me that Miss Penny ought to have more help than she can give her outside of school hours, for she has rheumatism so bad now that she's almost a cripple."

Glancing up, the speaker saw that the minister was upon them and smilingly apprised him of the obvious fact that Miss Garland had got back. He shook hands with Miss Garland and with the other three, questioned the former about her summer and declared that he should call upon her next week for a fuller account. Then he turned to Miss Merriman.

"What was that I overheard you saying, Miss Merriman?" he asked with his slow smile. "Did I hear you speak of *the other* Miller girl? And does that mean Anna?"

"Yes, Mr. Langley, Anna Miller. But that is what everybody in the South Hollow, and for that matter, in Farleigh, too, I guess, calls her. But she was away so long that people forgot there was such a person—such as knew of the family at all—and anyhow, she seems so different from Rusty. Of course she's pretty,—she looks for all the world like a doll,—and

everybody says she's good-natured to a fault. And there's something droll about her. And yet——"

The expression of Mr. Langley's face made her pause.

"Do you know, Miss Merriman," he said whimsically but at the same time rather wistfully, "at this moment it seems to me that to be supremely good-natured and somewhat droll is a triumph in itself."

He smiled and sighed.

"Nevertheless, life in the two villages will seem different without Rusty," he owned. "It will be quieter, but doubtless far less exciting."

He went into the church to fetch a book, then overtook Miss Garland and walked with her as far as the post office. And as they went, he asked her why she thought of Miss Penny as old; and they occupied the time recollecting dates and computing the passing of the years. And both felt older at parting, and one of them strangely depressed.

Just as Miss Penny had long realised that people called her an old lady so Anna Miller was quite aware that she was known as the 'other Miller girl.' But the younger resented the fact as little as the older. Anna adored her sister, looked up to her in many ways, and never dreamed of disputing or questioning her title as virtual head of the family. The girl knew, too, that she was pretty and in doll fashion, though she didn't herself consider doll-fashion bad. If the question had come up, she would have acknowledged promptly, too, that she was good-humored, and

she couldn't help realising that people thought her droll. Nevertheless, vain as she undoubtedly was, Anna Miller did not attach undue weight to any of these qualities, and otherwise would have been likely to rate her own powers lower than anyone else would have done. Enjoying life thoroughly, and perhaps more consciously than is usual at her years, she was quite content to be the 'other Miller girl' and to endeavor to stop any portion she might of the gap left in hearts and households by Rusty's absence.

But the girl was herself quite unconscious and others quite unaware of her most valuable characteristic. Young as she was, Anna Miller had one quality seldom gained before middle age, and rare even then,—a truly humorous outlook upon the world. The girl viewed life and her fellow human beings almost in the detached manner of a philosopher, yet warmly and sympathetically withal. She enjoyed oddities and idiosyncrasies which annoyed or vexed others and made allowance for larger faults with a singularly mature tolerance. She was one of the few who habitually demand less than they are willing to proffer,—simply and naturally and quite without any sense of superiority.

Experience had made Anna Miller prematurely middle-aged in her grasp of reality,—experience acting upon that endowment of good nature which everyone granted her. Running away as a child from the dreary, shiftless household that had been her home, for five years the girl had supported herself in the

great city to which she had fled, to the extent of keeping soul and body together, successively as errand girl to a dressmaker, as bundle and cash-girl, and finally as sales-girl in a department store. But all the while something within her—perhaps the adventurous instinct that had hurtled her forth—had responded to the clarion which is within the din of every struggle. She had known the extremes of heat and cold, of loneliness and hunger, but she had made light of them. She had clung to her shred of vanity, masquerading on an empty stomach, and cheering long hours in her cramped, dreary hall-bedroom arranging her tangle of pale yellow hair in various fashions before her tiny cracked mirror, trying on scraps of finery, and coquetting with the reflection which was always picturesque no matter how absurdly arrayed. She had ‘bluffed’ her way through the lean, meagre years, her shockingly slangy expression being a veritable gospel of cheer to her fellow clerks and lodgers, and the snatches of ugly popular songs on her lips, real melody which echoed in her own heart as well as in theirs. And she had ‘won out’ triumphantly with her natural sweetness of disposition not only unimpaired but strengthened and enriched, with a keenness of mind which is one of the ends of education, and with that curiously mature and humourous outlook instead of the bitterness which might have been expected.

On the day following that on which Mr. Langley had first heard her referred to as the other Miller girl,

Anna was in her usual place in Miss Penny's pew at the opening of the Sunday morning service. She was rather preoccupied by her new suit. Rusty had had to have a new one when she went to college, and she had insisted upon Anna's having one at the same time. Rusty's was brown, the peculiar russet shade that matched her hair exactly and was peculiarly Rusty's, loose in the jacket, and plain. Anna's was green, more elaborate than Rusty's and not in nearly so good taste, as Anna knew well. But it was exceedingly smart and very becoming and the girl was, as she declared, 'crazy over it.' Clever with her fingers, she had made a green velvet hat to match the suit, a three-cornered affair which did not fall far short of being utterly absurd, but which, set jauntily upon her riotous yellow hair, certainly made her little doll-face bewitching.

Anna had a very sweet voice and had been asked to join the choir, and during the anthem, she fixed her long-lashed blue eyes seriously upon the women members, studying, not their voices nor their manner of using their vocal organs, but their attitude and demeanour. As she saw herself in fancy standing behind the low railing in her new green suit and 'nifty' hat, she wondered if it wouldn't be an exceedingly pleasant change for the congregation to have a younger person to gaze upon and one who had more regard for the current fashions. And dear me! Every blooming member of the present choir had hair of the same colour, something between brown and drab. Anna

said to herself that when she should stand up among them to sing, if her long yellow braid with the curl at the end did not of its own accord flop over her shoulder, she would flop it,—it stood out so picturesquely against the green. Here in the pew, of course, it was just as well to let it hang down her back, for Miss Penny sat very near the pulpit.

So near, indeed, that she was directly in front of Mr. Langley,—which reflection induced another that when she should sit with the choir, Mr. Langley couldn't see her at all. That seemed a pity, and yet—Anna wondered if he saw her now,—saw her, that is, not as a soul but as a young girl in a new suit, with yellow hair shining like pale gold against it. He might possibly notice the latter, for his beloved little Ella May, who had died before the Millers had come to Farleigh, had had long golden curls.

Suddenly the girl recalled her roving gaze. Mr. Langley was preaching, and Anna hadn't even heard the text! It was right down mean, she said to herself, when anyone worked as hard as he did to write such beautiful sermons for people not to listen to every single word. He didn't write absolutely new sermons, indeed, he had so many on hand after preaching here for years and years and years; but they were new to the greater part of the congregation and practically so to all of them, for he worked over them, added new matter and quoted from new poems whose authors had been at school or in their cradles when

the sermons were first composed. Moreover they were quite fresh to Anna.

Though her mental equipment was haphazard, Anna Miller had a certain power of concentration. To-day, however, she had no sooner fixed her eyes resolutely upon the minister than her thoughts began to wander again. For it came to the girl suddenly and startlingly that Mr. Langley was changed—yes, greatly changed. He looked tired, but it was worse than that: he looked as if he had lost something. There seemed no longer to be any *springiness* about him. He was like a jack-in-the-box that has been so mishandled that when you open the lid he doesn't jump out at you but only flaps feebly. Mr. Langley was too young to have his springs go flat. He had only a few grey hairs. He was tall and slim and straight and graceful and really much handsomer than that floor-walker at Martin and Mason's that had been so stuck on himself.

Glancing hurriedly back over his life as she knew it by hearsay, Anna felt it to have been unusually placid and untroubled. Of course it had been a terrible grief to him losing his little girl, that golden-haired little Ella May who had gone about through the two villages scattering sunshine. But that had happened years ago and he had seemed happy and young until now. Then it came to her that this was, perhaps, Ella May's birthday. Perhaps he had it all to go through again every year as the day came round?

Early in the afternoon, Anna appeared suddenly in

the parlour, which was seldom used excepting on Sunday, briskly polishing a goblet with a cross-barred dish towel.

"O Miss Penny, tell me, when did Ella May die?" she asked. "Was it the twenty-second day of September?"

"O no, Anna, she died on the twenty-eighth day of December," Miss Penny returned promptly and in some surprise. And although the storms of more than a score of winters had yellowed the tiny marble lamb upon the little grave in the cemetery on the hillside where the minister's baby had been laid, probably every adult person in the parish could have given the date as readily.

Anna returned to the kitchen. Passing the mirror, she paused and gazed at her own image. She shook her head ruefully. Even with her festive blouse and smart skirt covered by her checked gingham overall, she was a picture, and after all, her hair looked as pale golden against this dull ground. Hastily gathering an handful of wet silver, she returned to the parlour.

"She had golden curls, didn't she, Miss Penny—little Ella May?" she asked.

"Long, golden ringlets and deep blue eyes," asseverated Miss Penny in the tone she used only in speaking of the dead.

"Well, was her birthday in September?"

"Why Anna Miller! She was born on Christmas-day—O my dear child, it must have been twenty-five

years ago this next Christmas-day, for I was fifty myself at the time and I am seventy-five now. That was the year I had my plum coloured moreen—you remember the under side of the cushion in grandma's old chair up in Reuben's room? Sarah Pettingill made it, and I wore it to the Christmas tree for the first time and word came while we were there that Mr. Langley had the finest gift in the world—a little daughter. Some of the ladies wanted him to call her Christmas and he said he'd like to have her named Carol, but she was called for his wife after all. Her maiden name was May."

Mrs. Langley was so little a personality in the mind of the girl that it seemed incongruous in her to have had a maiden name. As she would have asked a careless question in regard to her, however, she looked up to see Miss Penny's face drawn with dismay.

"Dear me, I know I am old, but I didn't think I was losing my memory," Miss Penny cried. "It comes to me all of a sudden that I wore that plum-coloured dress to the child's funeral. I remember distinctly my mother's telling me that plum-colour was next door to purple and that purple was light mourning and quite suitable for a young person's funeral.

"But you could have worn it to both," declared Anna. "You keep your clothes so well that it probably looked new for the funeral."

"But Anna, my aunt Penny died the February after that dress was made and mother and I coloured it

black for the funeral. And she died twenty-five years ago the tenth of February."

"Then it couldn't be the Christmas that Ella May was born that you had it, but the one before her death. I'm glad it wasn't, for I don't like her to be so old."

"But if the little thing wasn't born that year, I'm sure I don't know when she *was* born," remarked Miss Penny plaintively.

"We'll have to find out," said Anna cheerfully. "Anyhow, I'm glad it wasn't the twenty-second of September. I got to thinking of it at church and it sort of—got on my nerves."

Returning to her work, she couldn't get Mr. Langley and the mysterious, lamentable alteration in him off her mind. Ella May might have nothing to do with it—and then again she might. In any event, the first thing to be done was to learn the age of the child at the time of her death. She was just wondering whether she had time to go over to the cemetery that afternoon, when Miss Penny called her. Going into the parlour, she found Mrs. Phelps, their next-door neighbour.

"O Anna, what do you think?" cried Miss Penny in great excitement. "Mrs. Phelps says that Ella May Langley was only three days old when she died. She can prove it!"

CHAPTER I'

ANNA MILLER gasped. But she recovered herself immediately.

"Well then, you were right about the plum-coloured moreen, Miss Penny. It served for the christening and the funeral just like the baked meats in *Hamlet* that coldly furnished forth the wedding-feast," she commented. "Only—this is what gets me. How about those golden ringlets?"

"Dear me, dear me! I cannot understand!" cried Miss Penny in dismay. "Even now I seem to see that little thing as plain as day, toddling along beside Mr. Langley, in her fine white dress with the lace frill at the neck pressed down by those lovely long curls. I suppose I dreamed it."

"The fact is, Miss Penny, most everybody in the church feels just about so," remarked her neighbour.

She turned to Anna. "As I said to Miss Penny, the reason I am so sure about it all is because the marble lamb on their lot in the cemetery on Ella May's grave was the last thing my cousin Alfred ever did. Mrs. Langley was so particular that it should be copied from life from a lamb that was just three days old same as the baby was when she passed away that Albert had to wait until spring to do it. He went off

on a farm up in the hills beyond Marsden and stayed over two nights to make his sketches. He took to his bed that spring and never did another stroke of marble work. Mrs. Langley was more than satisfied with the monument and had it photographed and framed. The last I heard—which wasn't very lately—the photograph stood on the marble-topped stand in her room close to her bed."

Anna's eyes grew round. It seemed strange to hear Mrs. Phelps speak of Mrs. Langley as a person. Until to-day she had been hardly so much as a dim vision, a mere word, this woman who had been an invalid for more years than Anna had lived. She seemed far less a person than Ella May. And now to think of her—or to try to stretch her mind to think of her as Ella May's mother and Mr. Langley's wife gave the girl an uncanny feeling. And she couldn't mention her in the present tense.

"What was she like, Mrs. Phelps?" she asked in an hushed manner.

"Mrs. Langley? O Anna, don't ask me!" protested Mrs. Phelps. "She was pretty with soft dark eyes and fine brown hair the last time I saw her, but that was twenty-odd years ago."

"My goodness! Hasn't anyone seen her since?" asked Anna.

"It has been years and years, I don't know just how many, since the last outsider saw her. She had neuralgia in her face and headache. The last I knew she had had one headache for ten years. I don't

know whether that one is still going on or whether she had begun on another."

"I wonder if Mr. Langley sees her?" Anna asked.

"I believe he goes in once a day—he used to. But Bell Adams that keeps house for him takes care of Mrs. Langley and I guess she's the only one that ever really sees her."

Anna betook herself to the porch. Understanding had come to her. Poor Mr. Langley! He, too, had played with the vision of the golden-haired little daughter; all these years he had kept himself young with the image of his little girl in his heart. Most likely he hadn't thought of her as of any particular age—just a darling little girl. But now, since last Sunday,—since Wednesday, indeed, some idiot had reminded him that she would have been a grown-up young lady at this time. Anna could fairly see him shrinking, cowering before the appalling fact. Then he had taken a great leap headlong to overtake a daughter twenty-five years old!

What a pity! What a calamity, indeed! How would he ever get through the remainder of his life with his poor heart all flattened out and his vision forever shattered? But no one could bring the baby back nor could anyone halt or turn back the revolving years. Everything moved relentlessly on towards old age excepting that little marble lamb that would remain just three days old to the end of time.

But the marble lamb recalled Mrs. Langley, and suddenly Anna seemed to see a ray of light. Mrs.

Langley had been dead to the minister almost as long as the baby, and yet she wasn't hopelessly dead. Suppose she were to be restored to him? There must have been something very dear about one who had insisted upon the little symbolic image's being copied from a baby lamb just three days old, and if she still kept the photograph beside her in her loneliness and pain, she must herself be a lovely creature with the added saintliness of the years of patient suffering. If she could be restored to Mr. Langley, a sweet girl-wife, would not the weight of years that had suddenly pounced down upon him take instant flight? One was always hearing of people who had been bed-ridden for years getting well, and Mrs. Langley wasn't so bad as bed-ridden. 'Neuralagy' and sleeplessness and headache and the like were what ailed her, and youth saw no reason why these should not be speedily banished. Quite likely it might have been put through long since had anyone taken the matter in hand.

Anna grinned as she said to herself she would now be Charley on-the-spot. Mr. Langley had been goodness itself to Rusty and their father—to all the family, indeed. He was putting Rusty through college. Her mother and the boys worshipped him; and Anna herself really owed him most of all. For she had deserted her family for five years, coming back to find a quite different and to her ideal home, a changed father and mother and a wonderful sister—and all through Mr. Langley. In any case, Anna said to herself she would have wanted to do what she was

going to do (she didn't know how or even exactly *what* as yet) ; but as it was, she simply *had* to do it.

That evening when she and Miss Penny were having their tea, Miss Penny asked her how she happened to be thinking of Ella May that day.

"I noticed that Mr. Langley looked sort of sad this morning at church, and I was trying to scare up a reason," Anna returned.

"Sad!" cried Miss Penny in real distress. "O Anna!"

"Well, tired, perhaps," the girl amended.

"Do you suppose, Anna, that it can be because of his lifting me in and out of the phaeton every Sunday?" Miss Penny asked almost tragically. "If I thought it was that, I wouldn't go to meeting at all—though I should miss it—I don't know how I should get along without it. And then he might be hurt. Or—I suppose I could get that Luke Thompson—not his brother, you know—to help me. He isn't very bright, and yet—I hardly know whether I could offer him money. And yet how could I ask him unless I did? And I should have to explain to Mr. Langley—but so I should if I stayed at home. Only——"

"I could lift you myself. I could run three times round the house with you in my arms," Anna assured her. "It's nothing at all to Mr. Langley. He's got muscle to burn. I didn't mean that. I meant—I don't know exactly, but I believe he's tired at heart after all these years of well-doing. I'll tell you what his expression this morning makes me think of—pa's

Aunt Marthy he's always telling of who was taken with her last sickness in the dead of winter and had a terrible hankering for dandelion greens. She said she knew she'd get well if she could have just one mess of 'em—and the snow three feet deep on the ground. And when it came to the end and they asked her if she had any last wishes, she said: 'Thank you kindly, I could relish a mess of dandelions.' And while she was waiting for them, she died."

"We're all more or less like that, wanting something or other beyond our reach," commented Miss Penny with a smile and a sigh, "But I shouldn't think it of Mr. Langley."

"Do you know, Miss Penny, I believe I'll run in to see Mrs. Langley some day soon," Anna remarked.

Miss Penny looked as if she believed Anna had suddenly gone mad.

"She might take to me where she didn't to other people—some do, you know," the girl went on coolly. "And some people like just to look at me—on account of my hair, I daresay, for otherwise I'm not much to look at. It's a yard long, you know, if I pull it out perfectly straight."

"Anna, dear, there are moments when I almost think you are vain," said Miss Penny smiling. "But listen to me, child. Reuben stayed at the parsonage for weeks after his father passed away, and Mrs. Langley would never see him even once. And he was the sweetest little fellow! Mr. Langley would have liked to keep him, but of course he couldn't under

the circumstances. And so—you know how it all came about that he came here, don't you, Anna?"

"I have heard it many a time. It's one of pa's favourite yarns. But it's a good story and worth repeating just the same," Anna returned.

The girl's last waking thought was of standing by the invalid's couch bathing her aching brow with cologne-water. But in the course of the following week she learned that Mrs. Langley had acquired the reputation of being extremely formidable. Big Bell, as Bell Adams, the tall, large-boned, hard-featured but good-natured housekeeper was called, cherished considerable affection for her mistress but gave Anna no encouragement whatever. When she hinted that it might be well for her to see someone, Bell was horrified and aghast. It was as much as ever, she declared, that Mrs. Langley would see her own husband for two minutes a day.

Admitting that visiting Mrs. Langley would be no *cinch*, the girl was nevertheless undaunted. It wasn't natural for her to live in that way. If she weren't lonely, she ought to be; if she were not wretched, it was because there were no extremes in her life—only one dead level of headache and *neuralagy*. And constantly Anna came back to the realisation that there was something to appeal to in a woman who had thought of having the three days old lamb carved and who had cherished the picture of it all these years.

Finally she decided to see the image itself and receive, it might be, some inspiration or suggestion

for making a beginning. She learned the location of the minister's lot and set off secretly early Saturday afternoon.

The cemetery, which overlooked the whole valley of the river, was a retired, lonely place, hedged in by evergreen, yet not without beauty. Anna had been vaguely perplexed and anxious, but the serenity of the place soothed her, and she made straight for the minister's lot with a subdued eagerness of expectation that was almost adventurous.

Suddenly she saw it from a distance, the tiny baby lamb with its feet folded neatly beneath it. So little and quaint and homely it was, that the girl stifled a cry, a little motherly murmur of pity, as if the tiny creature were alive and had been left here lonely through all the long years. And running, she dropped down on her knees beside it to fondle it.

Then she shrank back and caught her breath sharply, almost in a sob. It was as if, believing it to be alive, she had found it dead. One side of the marble was sadly discoloured. It was so blackened indeed as to be quite defaced and ugly, to have lost all its symbolism and significance and to have become an hideous caricature. Suddenly the other Miller girl, who seldom shed tears, covered her face and wept.

CHAPTER III

MR. LANGLEY was nearer fifty than forty, though only by a little. He was, in a way, 'settled' in his habits. He liked and affected, on all days save the Sabbath, old clothes and old shoes, though both were always scrupulously neat, and his shabbiness was never otherwise than picturesque and attractive. Though he went about constantly among his people, he led a lonely, pensive life in the big, empty, shabby parsonage, almost as little aware, it would seem, of the existence of his invalid wife as were his parishioners who practically thought of him as a bachelor. And truly, since his wife had taken to her room upwards of twenty years ago, and shut herself out from everyone, he had been almost as literally widowed as if she, too, lay in the enclosure marked by the little marble lamb in the cemetery on the hillside.

For all that, Russell Langley had still somehow kept intact through all the years the heart of youth—almost of boyhood. Not that his parishioners were aware of it, except indirectly. Most of them regarded their beloved pastor and bore themselves towards him as if he had something like three score years to his credit—or debit. The boys and girls, it is true, the children and even the babies found him singularly

companionable,—but so did the very oldest. The greybeards of the congregation and those who were contemporaries of Russell Langley's grandparents talked to him as they would have talked to the latter had they been living and had their lines been cast in Farleigh instead of in Albany, New York. His youthful appearance impressed them only in the sense that he was a fine figure in the pulpit and a graceful presiding officer in the town hall whenever the services of such an one were required. His tall, slim, indolently erect figure was attributed to the fact that he had played base-ball at college, and the lack of lines in his face to freedom from family cares. For, when all is said, an invalid wife whom a clergyman sees no more frequently than an invalid parishioner and with whom he holds no conversation whatever is scarcely to be classed among family cares.

It was only the other Miller girl who recognised the elusive quality that made up a large part of the charm which everyone felt in the man. Likewise when this quality had taken flight, temporarily or irretrievably, it was Anna Miller who guessed the secret of its loss. Everyone knew that the minister had never forgotten his little daughter who had died. Ella May's name was constantly upon his lips. But Anna said to herself that the light of enthusiasm in his eye and the buoyancy of his step had been largely due to the thought of a child toddling or tripping along beside him.

Then suddenly he had lost her, had lost his child

companion and with her the spirit of youth. Some one must have said to him—some *idiot*, some *gump*, some *galoot*, the girl reflected indignantly—that Ella May would have been—was it possible that she would have been twenty-five if she had lived? Twenty-five! Poor Mr. Langley! He couldn't tote a person of twenty-five around with him leading her by the hand. It must have been a terrible shock to him to reach out for the golden-haired child and see a tall young lady with her hair put up and a college education! No wonder that he had grown old overnight, that his youth had fallen from him as if it had been something material, a mantle of slippery silk that had dropped from his shoulders at the loosing of a clasp.

Ah! but he should have it back. He should recapture it, the Reverend Russell Langley should, before it was beyond recall. He would renew his youth in the companionship of his youthful wife. Mrs. Langley was nearly forty-five, but she wouldn't look over thirty at the most—probably not over twenty-five. And twenty-five in a wife is quite another thing than in a daughter. It was work and care and fuss and bother that made people grow old, and she hadn't done a thing or had a care for nearly twenty-five years. Mrs. Langley had, as it were, lain upon rose leaves, gazed at the little pictured lamb (that was, alas! so much fairer than the marble image) and thought of all sorts of sweet and lovely things. She had suffered pain, of course, but that is refining and would only

add a pensive, perhaps mournful charm to her flower-like beauty.

A week from the day of her visit to the minister's lot in the cemetery, Mr. Langley passed the Miller house, bound for a conference at the academy, and the other Miller girl set forth for Farleigh, of which village the South Hollow was one end. As she drew near the parsonage, she saw a blue haze of smoke coming from the chimney of the summer kitchen. That meant that Big Bell was at work in that remote part of the house, and Anna's feet flew.

As she came to a lane which extended a few rods from the avenue which was the main street of the village to a pine grove which was originally the western boundary of a large farm, she glanced up absently. The one house in the lane had been vacant during the summer, but within a few weeks a mother and daughter, a rather mysterious pair, had moved into it. Now she saw a young girl, who was dark and looked handsome in an haughty fashion, on the steps. Anna waved her hand in a friendly way. The girl inclined her small head proudly, rose and went into the cottage.

"I do believe she's mad because I haven't been in to see her," Anna said to herself in dismay. "She's about my age and I'm the one who would naturally do it. Of course, they wouldn't let Mr. Langley in, but I'm different. Nobody would mind a little thing like me."

She was tempted to run up the lane and tap at the

door. But this afternoon was pledged to Mr. Langley and his girl-wife, and Anna regretfully left the lane behind her.

She opened the parsonage gate softly. If she could elude Bell the way was clear, for the front door stood open, and of course the screen door wouldn't be fastened. Creeping up the walk, she tried it gently. It did not yield. Peeping in, she could just make out that it was hooked.

As she stood irresolute, she noticed a loose place where the wire netting was tacked to the wooden frame of door. It was too late for June-bugs, but the season was still like summer and if there were any chance, moth millers would fly in by the score as soon as the lamps were lighted and commit suicide in their harrowing way. Poor things! It seemed wicked to entice them to destruction.

But there was no other way. Boldly the girl poked her finger through the aperture, tearing the netting ruthlessly until she could reach the hook and raise it. Then, withdrawing her scratched and bleeding hand, she opened the door softly and stole in, only to be immediately seized and oppressed by a sensation of guilt and even of fright. Pausing only a moment, however, she made her way noiselessly down the passage to the door of the room she knew to be that of the minister's wife. It was ajar and she knocked timidly.

Absolute silence save for the loud ticking of the

clock and the yet louder beating of her heart. Screwing her courage, Anna knocked again.

"Bell?" called out a strange, hoarse voice that accorded ill with the vision of the girl wife.

"No'm. It's me—Anna. It's the other Miller girl—Rusty's sister, you know," murmured Anna faintly. "Please may I come in? I want to—tell you something."

Without waiting for an answer, she pushed the door wide and entered a large, bare, gloomy looking chamber, darkened and musty-smelling though one window was open a few inches. For a minute she stood motionless, unable to make out anything clearly in the dimness. Then, as suddenly as if a blind had been raised or a match struck she saw the dark figure of the minister's wife dimly silhouetted against the dun background.

Mrs. Langley—if indeed it were Mrs. Langley?—had raised herself from the cushions of a padded arm chair and was staring at the intruder in mingled amazement and horror. And the girl, her heart in her mouth, stood as if transfixed and stared back. It was as if she had heard a tremendous explosion or witnessed a silent one (as one does in a dream) and found herself standing in the midst of a mass of wreckage—which might have been the shattered fragments of the bottle of cologne water with which she had in fancy bathed the white brow of the pale, romantic invalid she had pictured.

This woman's figure, outlined against the lowered



"Please, may I come in? I want to—tell you something."

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blind, was that of a witch, the shoulders being curved almost in an hump and the emaciated profile resembling the terrible nutcracker contour commonly associated with the broomstick. Her dark hair, streaked with yellowish grey, was strained back from her yellow face into a tight little wad on the back of her head. Her lips were colourless, her cheeks appallingly hollow. Her sunken eyes, set in deep, greenish cavities, burned fiercely beneath her frowning brow. She looked as old and ugly as a sybil and to Anna as wicked.

It was she who first recovered sufficiently to speak.

"Who are you and WHAT are you doing in my room?" she demanded in a voice that made the girl say to herself 'Hark from the tomb!' and gain thereby a bit of audacity.

"I'm the other Miller girl, Rusty's sister," she faltered. I just thought—I'd come——"

But she could not go on.

"Are you mad? Are you stark, staring crazy?" challenged the old woman whom Anna couldn't believe to be the minister's wife. As she spoke, large gaps on either side of her front teeth explained the unnatural hollows in her cheeks.

"N-no, I guess not. I'm only—sort of *fresh*," the girl gasped.

"Did Bell let you in?"—still more fiercely.

"O no, I let myself in," Anna returned, and as the fierce dark eyes bored into her she seemed forced to confess the whole enormity of her action as if she

had been a naughty child. "I poked my finger in and made a hole in the screen, but I don't believe it'll matter—it's so late,—the season, I mean."

"If you are not crazy, what do you mean by breaking into people's houses and disturbing the sick?" demanded the old woman. "Don't you know that I haven't seen anyone except the doctor for twenty-three years?"

"Twenty-three—that's *skidoo*," murmured Anna under her breath and caught another bit of spirit. Withdrawing her gaze, not without difficulty, from the face before her, she glanced about her, half fearfully, half boldly. A marble-topped table next the chair in which the invalid huddled was covered with bottles, apothecaries' boxes and medicine glasses. In their midst, a photograph in a velvet frame stood upright by means of a support at the back. As the girl's eye encountered this, on a sudden she knew it was the little lamb, and her fear took wings. Quite bold now, she went straight up to Mrs. Langley, held out her hand—which was ignored—and smiled ingratiatingly.

"The little marble lamb up in the cemetery," she murmured softly, "I went to see it. I thought you would like to know—that is, I thought you would want to know that it's all turned black and yellow and mildewed, and——"

"What!" the woman almost shrieked.

"The little lamb—the cunning little marble lamb on Ella May's grave with its little legs tucked under it like a baby kitten,—it's all black and—slimy!"

Mrs. Langley fell back among the cushions.

"My baby! My baby!" she cried, and the genuine pain in the harsh voice awaked the girl's pity. "Has no one looked after it? O, I might have known! I might have known!"

As she looked beseechingly at Anna, she seemed to see her for the first time.

"Sit down, little girl," she said, and her voice though not pleasant was less harsh.

Pity contending with shrinking, Anna fetched a chair and seated herself beside the table bearing the bottles and the photograph. As she fixed her eyes on the latter, the woman in the chair gazed at her. She had had no glimpse of youth, of young life, for more than twenty years, and it might not have been strange if this slip of a girl with her long-lashed demure blue eyes, her charming, peaked little face and her riotous yellow hair that almost seemed to light up the dark chamber, had appeared a supernatural visitant. She made an apparent effort to collect herself, to marshal forces that had been dormant for so many years as almost to have become non-existent.

"It was—good of you to tell me," she croaked. "Is it—ruined?"

"O no, indeed, one side of it is as good as ever, or nearly. A marble man could mend it up slick, I'm sure. But Mrs. Phelps' cousin Alfred isn't Charley-on-the-spot any longer because he cashed in right after he made it."

The invalid grasped only the first sentence. "I

should hate to have it—scraped,” she said in a low voice.

“I get you. So should I,” the girl responded eagerly. “Of course you know that it isn’t alive, but you can’t help feeling all the time just as if it were—those darling little sticks of legs tucked in under so naturally and all that. I shouldn’t want it scraped, either. Promise not to let on if I tell you something?”

The invalid looked as if she would have smiled if she hadn’t long since forgotten how.

“I promise,” she said in a voice which indicated the weary while since she had relaxed her terrible grimness.

“Well, when I saw it, so little and cunning and helpless, and then saw—what had happened to it, out there all alone, I just cried. I couldn’t help it, honestly.”

As she looked at the girl, tears came to the invalid’s eyes. The hand which held her pocket handkerchief to them was like a yellow claw, but they were less sharp when she removed it.

“O, don’t you feel badly about it, please, please,” Anna begged. “I’ll tell you what—I’ll clean it all up slick. I can use sand soap and all sorts of lightning cleaners. I’ll get someone to put me wise about cleaning marble without letting on what it’s for.”

“O, if you only would!” cried the invalid looking and speaking more like Red-Riding-Hood’s wolf than like the girl-wife Anna had dreamed of restoring to

her husband (who might be this woman's son or grandson).

"I hope—I didn't frighten you?"

"I was a bit fazed, but I shouldn't be again," Anna admitted as she rose. Then she caught her breath sharply at the thought of there being an *again*. And after all, why should there be? Though she couldn't help being sorry for her, there was nothing she could do with that sort of person. Surely she couldn't wish that sort of wife upon poor Mr. Langley!

"And you will tell me how you get along?" the other asked.

"Come here, you mean?"

"Of course," Mrs. Langley responded so promptly that Anna couldn't help feeling how elated she must have been if the invalid had been the invalid of her fancy. She felt a bit indignant as she asked herself why, with absolutely nothing to do for twenty years and no real illness, this woman couldn't at least have kept her figure and her complexion. "How soon can you do it, little girl?" Mrs. Langley added.

"Not before next Saturday, for I'm in school—the academy. So you see I'm not what you'd call a little girl. Well—so long."

She held out her hand. The hand of the invalid was cold and clammy, besides being like a claw, and as she let herself out, on a sudden Anna shivered. The yellow face with its cavernous eyes, the sunken mouth, the gaping teeth, the claw-like grasp of her hand,—

the girl made a wild dash to get away from it all only to run violently into Mr. Langley, who was coming slowly up the walk with bent head.

Apologising in profound distress, as if it had been his fault, he asked Anna if she had been looking for him, that being the sole reason that anyone but the doctor ever came to the parsonage.

"No, sir," faltered the girl oppressed by a sudden and awful sense of guilt towards him, "I came to see—your wife."

"What's that, Anna?" he demanded looking at her as if he doubted her sanity or his own sense of hearing.

"I've been—visiting with your wife," the girl said and laughed hysterically.

With a startled face, he pushed by her into the house. And only then Anna realised the whole force of the situation, the ugly, naked fact. She—that terrible old woman who was really an old hag, was Mr. Langley's wife!

She began to run, wildly, blindly, pursued by the terrible vision. She did not see the girl who lived in the lane come forth into the avenue on an errand, and ran directly into her arms.

CHAPTER IV

REUBEN CARTWRIGHT'S father had built the house in the lane at Farleigh, and one who had known Dick Cartwright well would have said the cottage was like him. There was something odd and unusual about it which gave it a peculiar charm without making it startling or bizarre; and something of his whimsicality seemed to have crept into the arrangement of nooks and corners and cupboards and book-cases. Oddest of all was the living-room, which was disproportionately large and contained a good-sized platform, raised three feet or more above the floor, which was to have held the pipe organ which the years were to have brought. But the years, instead of bringing the pipe-organ, fame and other desiderata, material and otherwise, had taken away from Dick Cartwright his greatest blessing, his wife and sweetheart whose presence and companionship had been the necessary conditions of fulfilling and enjoying his dreams. And after her death, the quaint cottage with the platform for the organ and the odd bits of furniture he had made and carved were only a mockery to Dick Cartwright. He had his little boy, it is true, who was very like his mother, and he had Mr. Langley as an intimate friend; but he could not forget

Jessie and he took to drink to ease the torture remembrance was. Whereupon he forgot not only Jessie but their child and his duty as well. He lost his place as organist at Farleigh church and as book-keeper at one of the banks at Wenham. And when presently, three years after the death of his wife, he disappeared, it was found that he had lost his house also and all his possessions.

When news of his death in a railway wreck near Chicago came to Mr. Langley, who had meanwhile sheltered Reuben, he made enquiries and found that the cottage had been mortgaged to its full value. The bank at Wenham which held the mortgage offered the cottage for sale, then, when no purchaser appeared, for rent. Soon after, an elderly couple whose married daughter lived in the South Hollow took it and occupied it for six years until early in the preceding summer when their daughter had been widowed and they had gone to live with her. The cottage stood idle all summer but early in September a new family moved in, a mother and daughter, the first strangers to come to the village for years. No one knew whence they came nor who they were. They moved in so quietly that scarcely anyone knew the house was occupied until they saw smoke coming from the squat, picturesque chimney.

No one had seen the mother; but the daughter, who had answered the door or gone out on errands, was said to be as handsome as she was haughty. They responded to no friendly overtures, refusing entrance

even to Mr. Langley, and seemed to feel themselves superior to the place and the people and to the cottage where they lived which was, indeed, a simple dwelling when compared with the simplest summer homes of the wealthy. For they were said to have been enormously wealthy and suddenly to have found themselves penniless at the death of the husband and father who had gambled or speculated until he had come to his last farthing. It was understood that they were relatives or connections of the president of the bank at Wenham, who had offered them the shelter of the cottage in the lane.

Anna Miller attributed their desire for seclusion to grief over the death of the husband and father rather than to pride. She couldn't help fearing what had evidently occurred to none other than he might have died by his own hand, and she felt that such a shock might well leave them too sore and sick at heart to wish to see any human being. Nevertheless she said to herself, with an assurance that was made up of humility and warm-heartedness as well as of vanity, that she would somehow effect an entrance where others failed.

When she ran straight into the strange girl's arms on the day she was fleeing from the parsonage and the spectre she had elicited, the one shock counteracted the other. Controlling her hysterical shuddering, she murmured an earnest apology.

"Dear me! I might have knocked you down, but-

ting into you that way. You are sure I didn't hurt you?"

"Not at all," the girl repeated quietly, and Anna liked her voice as much as her dark, pretty face. "But what was it?" she asked. "Was someone or something chasing you?"

Anna smiled rather wanly as she moved back to get the support of the stone wall which fenced the lane. "Not exactly, unless it was a ghost," she said in her usual droll way. "Sit down here, won't you, and I'll tell you about it."

"I mustn't stop," the girl said nervously. "I only thought—you needed help."

"So I do, the worst way. Honest, I'm like a rag. My knees shake and——"

The stranger sat down on the wall beside her and put her arm about her shelteringly. Anna leaned against her gratefully and closed her eyes for a few moments. The older girl gazed at her wonderingly. An hungry, almost a starved look came into the dark eyes and the arm which supported Anna clasped her almost fiercely.

Anna opened her eyes and smiled without moving.

"You'll think I'm a perfect baby," she declared, "but truly I have had a queer sort of shock."

She sat erect and slipped down, then seated herself again. "I'm too wobbly to walk just yet. I'll wait a bit until I feel better or see a waggon. I wish you felt like waiting with me?"

The other girl's brow puckered in a slight frown. Anna introduced herself.

"I am Anna Miller. I have wanted awfully to get acquainted with you, though truly I didn't mean to break in the way I did."

The dark girl smiled vaguely and rose slowly from the wall. Anna sprang up also.

"You mind—waiting alone?" the stranger asked hesitatingly.

"I'm not afraid, only I don't seem to feel like facing my thoughts at this moment. I guess I'll hike along if you're leaving me."

As she breathed a deep sigh, the dark girl looked at her in troubled fashion.

"Come up to our cottage and have a cup of tea first," she asked in a constrained manner. Anna said afterwards to Miss Penny that if she had talked Latin she would have used the form of interrogation that expects the answer no.

"I'd like to, first rate, if it wouldn't be too much bother for you," she said frankly. And when the other assured her that it would be no trouble, she put her hand on her arm and they went up the lane together.

The outer door led straight into the living-room. As they entered, a tall, handsome, dark-eyed woman with a proud, forbidding countenance rose from a chair and confronted them.

"Mother, this is Miss Miller," the girl said depre-

catingly. "She doesn't feel well—she's faint and I want to make her a cup of tea."

"Not Miss Miller,—Anna, please. No one calls me anything else," the girl asked in her sweet young voice. But the woman, who bowed stiffly without extending her hand, asked Miss Miller stiffly to be seated. Anna dropped limply into a chair. The other girl went out of the room.

"I—I didn't catch your name," murmured Anna.

"Lorraine," said the woman coldly and yet with a certain fierce warmth.

"Somehow that name sounds very familiar to me," Anna observed, only to perceive by the woman's face that she had made an extremely *mal à propos* remark. "I suppose it's the city—or province in France I am thinking of," she added lamely.

"Quite likely," returned Mrs. Lorraine frigidly, and taking up a piece of embroidery began sternly to set fine stitches in it. Anna glanced at her timidly.

"How pretty your fancy-work is," she remarked, politely deprecatory. She told Miss Penny afterwards that she wondered the stuff weren't all eyelet-holes, for Mrs. Lorraine's eyes, black as they were, reminded her of burning coals. And she declared that hereafter she would believe in the tamarisk or basilisk or whatever the bird was whose gaze turned one to stone.

"It could hardly be called fancy work," Mrs. Lorraine rejoined, and her voice was the more cutting in that it was naturally good and had the modulations of one who has lived among educated people in society.

"I make my living and that of my daughter—or try to—doing this work."

Anna felt she should have run from this house also had not the daughter appeared at this moment with a tray containing a cup of tea and a plate of biscuit. She took it gratefully and in her nervousness scalded her throat so that tears came to her eyes. It would have been easy to burst into tears, and the girl resolutely studied the pattern of the napkin. So doing, she noticed that it was of the finest damask she had ever seen but was apparently old for it was darned and patched. Somehow, she had never heard of patching napkins. But she felt Mrs. Lorraine's piercing eyes upon her and transferred her attention to the silver spoon which was also old, very thin and exceedingly fine.

"They were my grandmother's, and I kept the dozen. They were too thin and worn to be worth anything," Mrs. Lorraine declared in the manner of challenge. And Anna felt that she could endure no longer. Gulping down the tea, she rose to her feet.

"I must be going," she said and turning to the daughter thanked her for the refreshment.

"I feel so much better," she said. "I——"

Pausing, she gazed wistfully at the girl who seemed sweeter and gentler in contrast with her mother's haughtiness, and to whom Anna's heart went out warmly. It seemed as if she couldn't leave her without pledge of another meeting. But when she asked if she might call for her on the morrow to go to

church, Mrs. Lorraine said that she and her daughter did not go out.

"Just the same, I am sure there were tears in that sweet girl's eyes," Anna told Miss Penny that evening. "She is all ready to be friendly, but what can she do with that terrible old woman. And yet—I'm sorry for her, too, poor thing!"

"I suppose she doesn't like to appear out after being so rich, though they must have some of their fine clothes left," returned Miss Penny. "But it may be their carriage, you know, though for that matter I don't know why even people with a coachman and footmen should care to drive to church when it's only across the way—that is, it's cross-wise from the parsonage and there's only one house between the parsonage and the lane, and Reuben's father didn't have to start until the last minute, though he was always there, of course, to begin to play before the opening of service. And there's no barn for the carriage and where would they put the coachman?"

"They could make a nice little coop for him by putting hinges on the floor of the pipe organ platform and making a lid of it," remarked Anna lightly. She had decided on the way home that she would not mention her visit to the parsonage to anyone. She would fulfill her promise, clean the little marble lamb and then forget all about it and about Mrs. Langley and go back to thinking of Mr. Langley as if he were a bachelor. She would make no further ill-advised efforts to bring back his youthfulness; she would be

thankful if she hadn't added ten years to his age. If he didn't appear to-morrow in the pulpit with snow-white hair she would thank her lucky stars and never meddle with his affairs again.

"I forgot there's a shop on the place,—it went with the old house that was torn down," Miss Penny remarked and went on to try to fit the coachman and at least one footman in there, though she could not recollect whether there was a second story or loft or not. And Anna listened absently and thought of Mrs. Langley.

Fortunately the third Saturday was also fair. Anna set out early with a basket that might have been intended for autumn wild flowers but really contained cloths, a cake of sand soap, a bottle of ammonia and a tiny vial containing acid. As she followed the winding foot-path leading up the hill, and all the while she was working on the stone with patient skilful fingers, she seemed to hear over and over in her mind, she seemed to scrub to the rhythm of the warning *Let sleeping dogs lie, Let sleeping dogs lie*. Mr. Langley wouldn't have thanked her for arousing that old woman to life,—but fortunately she *hadn't* done any such thing. It was only temporary—a flare-up of interest that would die down as soon as she should be satisfied concerning the stone. She would report her success—for she was succeeding—on her way home and would thereafter leave her in the condition in which she had found her and wherein she seemed perfectly content.

When she had done, the little image was so white and sweet and appealing that Anna was loth to leave it. And when she bent to kiss the meek little head in long farewell she couldn't help thinking pityingly of Mrs. Langley. Poor thing! Poor forlorn creature! If only someone had gotten at her earlier before she had become a petrified mummy! It was too late now, but Anna wished with all her heart she could see the little lamb in its new freshness. She was sorry for her, more than sorry. Nevertheless as she descended the hill the girl simply could not face the thought of that darkened, musty room with the wild eyes glaring through the dimness. She decided to write a note and took a bypath which avoided the parsonage.

That night she wrote a note which her brother Frank delivered after Sunday school next day:

"DEAR MRS. LANGLEY, the little lamb is white as snow again, a perfect darling,—*fleckless* as the books would say. I had to kiss its little head when I had finished, it was such a cutey. As I ought really to be studying up to my ears to keep up with the little cash-girls of the ABC class, I will send this note by my brother instead of disturbing you. I will keep my eye on the image from this time on.

Yours faithfully,

ANNA."

As she finished the letter, Mrs. Phelps came in. Anna knew by her face that she had some exciting or shocking bit of news to relate, and her heart sank.

Quite likely the report of her visit to the parsonage was all over the place!

"Have you heard about the Lorraines?" she asked.

"The Lorraines?" repeated Anna.

"Yes, Anna. Do you happen to know where Mr. Lorraine is?" Mrs. Phelps asked eagerly.

"In heaven I trust," Anna murmured with charitable intent.

"Not at all and never will be unless he mends his ways. He's behind the bars. He is serving a sentence of ten years in prison for embezzlement!" cried Mrs. Phelps almost triumphantly.

CHAPTER V

“O ANNA,” cried her mother as soon as the girl had seated herself, “have you heard about the people who have moved in where the Converses moved out?”

“Why, Jenny, that’s the house where Reuben was born and brought up,” observed Seth Miller. “It was before we knew Reuben or had any suspicion there was such a person, and we get in the way of thinking he always lived at Miss Penny’s; but I mistrust he had a good home and indulgent parents until his ma died, and his pa, who was one of them musical geniuses, took to drink.”

“Yes, ma, I heard about the Lorraines. Mrs. Phelps told Miss Penny last night,” returned Anna who always spent Sunday afternoon at her own home, which was diagonally across the way from Miss Penny’s. The girl was pale to-day and leaned listlessly back in her chair in a way that was foreign to her wonted lively self. Her mother had noticed in church that Anna, who was always thin, had grown intensely so within the last fortnight and had hastened to get the dinner dishes out of the way before her daughter should rush in and take the task off her hands.

"It was all in the papers last spring," said Miller. "They was chock full of it for a spell, and the queer part of it was that the denouncement of the hull thing came right at the same time Wat Graham was arrested over at Wenham. If it hadn't 'a been for Wat's brother-in-law, Mudge, going bail for him and helping settle with the creditors, why Wat himself might 'a been in the cell next to Mr. Lorraine."

"Why, Pa Miller! Wat Graham's in another class altogether," protested Anna.

"I know they called Lorraine an embezzler, but I supposed that was only a polite name for thief," her father rejoined. "Anyhow, it looked from the papers and from what was said over to Spicer's last night as if he was a particularly mean kind of thief—sort of specialized on widders and orphans, you might say."

Anna uttered a little cry of protest. Mrs. Phelps had said that the story was that Lorraine's crookedness had involved thousands of small investors who had lost their all through him. She had added that more than one of those ruined thus had committed suicide. As Anna had lain awake thinking of it, she had tried to convince herself that the latter statement was false, and the rest exaggerated. She hadn't succeeded, but it was not until now that she realized that she had utterly failed. Poor Miss Lorraine! And no wonder Mrs. Lorraine protected herself with the bristles and spikes of a porcupine!

"Reuben will most likely feel cut to have such

people living in his old house," Mrs. Miller opined sadly.

"O ma, they can't help it, and they aren't that sort themselves at all!" cried Anna.

"And my patience, Jenny, Reuben would be the last one in the world to object to anybody because they was down; the quickest way to reach Reuben's heart is to be in trouble," declared Seth Miller loyally. "He started out as a little shaver by rescuing a poor, forlorn tramp cat, and he's been like a shepherd seeking for lost sheep ever since. By the by, Anna, did I ever tell you that story—how Reuben clumb the highest tree in the county and like as not in the state?"

"You certainly did, pa, the very day after I got back, and many's the time you have offered to tell it to me again," retorted the girl. "Miss Penny told me the same story the second time she laid eyes on me and this very week she refreshed my memory with all the fine points of it. But all the same, it's a first rate yarn, and Reuben's a brick."

"That was the beginning of his going to Miss Penny's," Seth Miller went on as if he could not leave the fascinating subject. Then suddenly he opened his eyes wide to see Mr. Langley drive up to the gate.

As Mr. Langley stepped on the porch, Anna was seized with a sudden and almost unaccountable sense of guilt. She felt as if she must make her escape. But there was no stairway except that in the front passage, and here was her mother beamingly ushering the minister in upon her. But as she glanced up—

even indeed, as she heard his step, the girl was reassured. Somehow, it seemed as if Mr. Langley had recaptured his springiness. He looked his old young self again, and as he took her hand he smiled in a way that made her feel as if she had had a benediction all to herself.

"O Anna, my dear child, Mrs. Langley wishes very much to see you," he said eagerly and with a certain largeness that would have been amusing if it hadn't been pathetic. For it seemed to indicate that he was the bearer of a mandate from royalty.

"She expected you yesterday, it seems, and to-day she was so disappointed to get a note instead of a call that I volunteered to come up at once and fetch you."

Thus far no one outside the parsonage had known of that audacious visit of Anna's. Seth Miller's face wore an expression half-jaunty, half proud. No man had such extraordinary daughters as he, and sometimes it seemed as if Anna were quite as remarkable as Rusty. But Mrs. Miller looked frightened.

Mr. Langley turned to her with his charming smile.

"What do you think, Mrs. Miller! This is the first time that Mrs. Langley has felt any interest whatever in anyone or anything since we lost our little Ella May," he said in a sort of hushed wonderment. "You will spare Anna for a little while, won't you? I'll bring her back shortly safe and sound."

When Anna returned to Miss Penny's at tea time, she found her in a state of almost wild excitement.

"O Anna, do sit down and tell me all about it," she

cried. "For the first time in my life I was glad—no, I can't say I was glad, but I wasn't really disappointed that Mr. Langley didn't come in. Not that he thinks it wrong, being Sunday, and anyhow I really am an old lady and won't be getting out to service many years more. But he had the Smith's horse, you know. It was nice of him to bring you home, but of course he would. He thought you were here—that was why he stopped. And to think of Mrs. Langley's asking for you all of her own accord. Dear me, dear me, what does she look like and did you have a nice time?"

"Not exactly what you would call slick," replied Anna in her droll way that cloaked her weariness even for herself. "There was nothing lively enough about it to break the Sabbath. Our conversation was confined to the subject of tombstones."

"O Anna, my dear!" said Miss Penny in mild reproof as if it were sacrilegious to speak lightly of such things.

Anna related briefly the occasion of her first visit and described the restoration of the marble image in the cemetery.

"Bless its little heart!" cried Miss Penny who was as enthusiastic as Anna in her love of animals. "It must be sweet. I wonder I never thought of going to look at it on Memorial day. I used to go to the cemetery regularly every year until I got so lame."

"We'll drive the pony up there some day. It's not far to walk from the gate," Anna said.

She dropped into a rocking chair, let her yellow head

fall wearily back against the cushion and closed her eyes.

"I had to tell her of it over and over and over," she said presently, raising her lashes pensively.

"Anna, you are very tired!" cried Miss Penny.

"Only a wee bit and it isn't exactly *tired*, then," declared the girl. "But you know how it is when you go into a painty room or pass by that awful-smelling tannery place beyond Wenham? You don't draw a long breath all the while and yet you don't realise that you're holding your breath. Well, there's something about Mrs. Langley and her room that makes you feel as if you were sitting on the edge of your chair waiting until you can get out where you see sunshine and people that talk and smile. Her eyes, you know, like coals of fire in the Bible, and great hollows in her cheeks and a voice that seems to come from a cave or a tomb. The blinds are drawn down almost to the window sills and there are medicine bottles to burn. There's air enough, I suppose, but not the kind that's sweetened by sunshine. It seems musty and makes you feel as if there were spiders in all the dark corners—huge black spiders with bodies big as this and crooked legs!"

"O Anna!"

"Sure thing! And what do you think? She wants me to come to see her every Saturday,—every blooming Saturday afternoon, Miss Penny."

"Anna dear, I wouldn't do it. You really must

not," said Miss Penny gravely. "It would be too great a strain upon you."

Anna threw herself on the hassock at Miss Penny's feet leaning her head upon the knee that was not lame.

"Really, Miss Penny, I am glad to go again and every Saturday," she said softly. "Mr. Langley almost had tears in his eyes when he spoke of it. I didn't dare look at him again to make sure, because after I had come out of that creepy place it wouldn't have taken much to set me to crying."

"I understand," murmured Miss Penny stroking the girl's yellow hair. "And to tell the truth, Anna, I almost envy you in being able to do something for Mr. Langley. Ever since he came to be our preacher, I have longed to do something for him to express my appreciation and affection for him, but it always seems impossible. It has always been the other way—his doing for me. And the best things in my life have come to me through him, Reuben and Rusty and now you, Anna."

"Miss Penny," said Anna quickly, "you know he visits her every day. Do you suppose he kisses her?"

"Dear me, Anna! what a question! I'm sure I have no idea. I suppose he does."

"But how can he! But you haven't seen her as she is now, and you never could imagine how she looks. He certainly seems to think a heap of her all the same, and as he can see as well as I can in the dark, he can't help seeing that she looks old enough to be his great aunt. Well, I'm sorry for her but I

wouldn't be related to her for a gold mine. However, I can stand it once a week all right."

In the following days, they recurred to the matter frequently. A dozen times, Miss Penny suggested suddenly a new topic of conversation that had popped into her head as appropriate for Anna to introduce as an alternative to that of tombstones; but each one being only more utterly absurd than the foregoing, Anna would laugh until she cried, Miss Penny joining her merrily. None the less, when she returned late Saturday afternoon, she announced that she had gotten away from the little lamb, though not perhaps very far.

The girl had proposed one subject after another, receiving no response. And it had presently been borne in upon her there could hardly be a response in the nature of the case. Mrs. Langley was really living, so far as she was alive at all, in another generation, so that trying to converse with her was like shouting to someone miles behind one on the highway and only visible because of curves in the course of it. The years she had lived in retirement had counted for little more than nothing. Her mind was twenty years younger than the village she dwelt in.

"When I realised that, I tried to get back, and after a bit she was glad to talk about Ella May," Anna said to Miss Penny as she dried the china after tea. "Only you would hardly know it *was* Ella May. Mr. Langley's Ella May has been growing all these years until she went to college with Rusty and jumped ahead and graduated and—O dear me! Hers is still a teeny baby

three days old. Now, Miss Penny, when those two get to heaven one of them is going to have the surprise of their lives."

"Why Anna," murmured Miss Penny reproachfully.

"Meantime, things are at sixes and sevens with both of them. What she needs is another baby, and what he needs is a full grown wife. Both of 'em need it frightfully. But how in the world is it ever going to be brought about, and who is to do it? I may think I am Charley-on-the-spot for ordinary cases, but a sticker like this stumps me flat. It would take someone a heap smarter than me to haul her over all the years she has missed and bring her up to date. And while that's being done to her mind, her face, her looks ought to be stretched the other way until she looks somewhere near as young as her husband.

The girl sighed. "It's like the North-west Passage. It ought to be done, and I suppose it could be, but not by yours truly. And the worst is, she refuses to see anybody else. She hardly pays any more attention to Mr. Langley than she did before—just sends him orders about me through Big Bell. O Miss Penny, did you ever hear the proverb 'Let sleeping dogs lie'?"

CHAPTER VI

MEANTIME the other Miller girl had made a second call at the house in the lane which Reuben's father had built. When her rat-a-tat at the door sounded drearily as from an empty house, the girl said to herself that it was too much. Most likely the ogress had slain her lovely daughter and then fallen dead herself and their corpses lay stretched upon the organ platform in the room which would never be a living-room thereafter. But the lovely daughter came to the door. The cold, haughty expression on her face changed to eagerness as she saw Anna and she smiled sweetly and rather touchingly.

"O Miss Miller, I am so glad—to see you," she said. But with the last words enthusiasm had become dismay. She paled and looked appealingly at Anna.

"Don't call me Miss Miller, please. Nobody does. And—may I come in?" asked Anna.

"I am so sorry, Miss—Anna, but mother—we don't have company, you know."

"But I'm not company. And anyhow, I've got to come in this once for I've got something for you," Anna declared.

As the proud look returned to the older girl's face and she started to say something in regard to her

mother, Anna drew forth from the covert of her jacket a tiny ball of a maltese kitten with a white parting between its baby blue eyes, a line of white waistcoat, and four white paws, two of which had extra toes. Nothing could have been rounder or silkier or more altogether appealing than this baby kitten with its round, innocent eyes and its bit of pink tongue visible, and as Anna held it out, the other girl took it ecstatically and held it close to her face. Then she cried out impulsively to her mother and ran with it to her. Anna followed her in, closing the door behind her.

Anna's purpose had been deliberate. Still, it was almost unbelievable to see Mrs. Lorraine's grimness melt before that absurd mite of kitten. As her daughter passed it over to her, she, too, hid her face against its softness. Then she put it in her lap and gazed at it in a sort of fascination, her daughter hanging over her and quite unnecessarily calling attention to the little thing's charms. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Lorraine hadn't handled—hadn't even seen—a baby kitten of the ordinary, harmless, necessary cat-kind since she had been a child in a New England farmhouse and had worshipped the successive litters of a three-coloured Tabby that had lived at one of the barns. They had left the farm for the city before she was twelve; but though she had had pets in the elegant home her parents had fallen heirs to and in the magnificent residences of the millionaire she had married, they had been the expensive, pedigreed so-

phisticated pets of the rich and hadn't appealed to her as Tabby and her kittens and the mongrel shepherd dog of the farm had done. And not even the latter had so appealed to her as this tiny plebeian offspring of a too prolific Tabby mother who kept the tender-hearted Anna busy in finding homes for her numerous kittens. Her sore heart could reach out to its innocence without injury to her wounded pride.

"It is a love, isn't it?" remarked Anna presently, partly to call attention to herself and partly because she couldn't help it. For she was herself 'crazy over' the kitten, as she put it. And joining the little group, she pointed out its double paws and the white tip of its tail which were the only details the daughter hadn't exclaimed over.

"I started out right after school to find a home for it. There were three of them but the grocer at the Hollow took the yellow twins—I suppose he'll call 'em the Gold-Dust Twins. It looks as if I needn't go further. Are you willing to take him in, Mrs. Lorraine?"

"I don't know that we ought to," returned Mrs. Lorraine, trying to speak stiffly. But somehow, even the thought that perhaps it would be wrong for the family of a criminal to indulge themselves even so little was ineffectual to stiffen her with that soft little ball in her lap.

"Mother!" cried the girl beseechingly.

"You will need a cat, you know. Every household does," said Anna sagely. "This one will make a

fine one, too. All of Tabby's kittens do. Never a one has failed to give satisfaction in the households in which I have placed them. Ma's never had any mice in our house since I brought the mother-cat home. I found her on a lonely road a mile or more from any house. Just think, someone had abandoned her. It must have been someone in Wenham that came over to drop poor Tabby, for before there wasn't a three-coloured cat in all Farleigh."

"We had a tortoise-shell cat on the farm when I was a little girl," remarked Mrs. Lorraine quietly with a gentler look in her eyes than Anna would have believed possible. "Alice, perhaps the kitten would like some milk," she added.

Alice fetched a saucer and put it on the hearth. Mrs. Lorraine placed the kitten beside it as gently as if it had been a fragile egg shell and the three hung over it eagerly. The kitten put his nose in so far that he spluttered amusingly and once he dipped a paw in; but it was too light to overturn the dish and he drank enough to prove himself of sufficient age to be taken from his mother.

"Now he'd like a nap," remarked Anna, picking him up. She wanted to give him to Alice (sweet name, Alice Lorraine!) who hadn't had a chance at him at all; but she put him into Mrs. Lorraine's lap and he curled into a yet rounder ball and was asleep at once.

"Speaking of tramp cats," Anna remarked, though as a matter of fact the subject hadn't come up, "you

probably know that Reuben Cartright once lived in this house?"

"Reuben Cartright—is he a musician?" asked Mrs. Lorraine.

"Dear me, no. His father was a musician, though he wasn't noted. He was organist at the church for a long time. He built this house, though not with his own hands. Did you ever wonder what that platform was for?"

"I thought this was a very old house and that perhaps that was a trundle bed," said Alice. Anna laughed and Mrs. Lorraine had to smile.

"Mr. Cartright had the floor raised so that when he got rich he could have a pipe organ put in," Anna explained. "I believe the clothes-press in the chamber above is right over the platform and the same size and they say he planned to tear out the floor of that so that the space would go way up to the roof. But it never came to that. His wife died and he took to booze and that was the last of him as well as of the pipe organ."

"Is the son musical?" asked Mrs. Lorraine, speaking softly as if the sleeping kitten were a baby.

"Yes'm, in a way, though he's never had much chance. He has beautiful hands, slim with long fingers, and his father gave him lessons up to the time Reuben was nine and his mother died. Since then Reuben has never had time for music. He has worked his own way, and besides—as pa says, ever since he rescued that tramp cat from the pine tree in

the common at the Hollow, he's been on the look out for that sort of extra jobs. It's a sort of private joke between me and myself, the story of that rescue is, though I shouldn't dare let Miss Penny know it, or pa or Rusty, my sister. I was away from home five years—ran away to seek my fortune and never caught up to it—and this happened in my absence. Pa told me the story the day after I got home and then Miss Penny. Ma told me, too, and no end of other people offered to. And to this day, pa or Miss Penny will ask me whether I happened to hear this or that particular and even if I say yes are likely to go on as if they suspected I didn't get it straight or whole. But I will say it's a good story and will bear repeating."

"O Anna, won't you please tell it to us!" cried Alice, and her mother looked acquiescent and perhaps eager.

Anna complied. The tale had, indeed, been told many a time before in Farleigh to the end of the Hollow; but though no narrator had ever before employed such a jargon of slang as the other Miller girl used, perhaps none had ever told it better nor more sympathetically. The telling of it amused and interested Alice Lorraine, who was already more drawn towards Anna Miller than she had been to any girl she had known before, but it affected her mother more powerfully. Henrietta Lorraine ('Hetty' was the little girl of the farm) had been for years a cold, proud woman, a slave, unconsciously, to her hus-

band's vast possessions. During the past six months, following the disgrace of her husband and his commitment to prison, her pride had become a sort of fierce arrogance, while her sense of injury, her bitterness towards all the world had shut her within bars hard as iron. But now as she sat quiet, the tension of months relaxed, with the kitten in her arms, and listened to the tale the odd, droll, charmingly pretty, appealing young girl rattled off so flippantly, something began to melt within her. Nor was it merely the icy crust that had protected her crushed feelings of late. As the kindly folk of the story rose compellingly before her, called forth by the wand of humourous sympathy of the yellow-haired fairy, and she saw not only Reuben Cartwright and the forlorn cat, but Miss Penny and Mr. Langley, the fat pony and the fat janitor who later was nearly to burn the grammar school building to the ground,—as she saw all this and more, the woman she had been for years was so moved that she felt almost like the woman she might and should have been. Alice got only the story Anna told. Her mother, who had been a country child herself and whose natural sympathy was with country folk and ways, got a broader view and a deeper vision. She felt something genuine and fine and sincere and worth while in this bit of village life,—something that was attainable to others. And it came to her that possibly Alice's life and even her own weren't irretrievably ruined and wrecked. In any event, terrible as had been the storm which had over-

whelmed them, in the restful atmosphere of this place to which they had been forced to crawl for refuge, they could at least draw long breaths of relief, and Alice might later find more than refuge and relief.

At the end of the story, Anna rose hastily. "I must hike or Miss Penny will be limping round to get tea," she said. "Poor dear! She doesn't drive the fat pony herself now-a-days and can't get out of the phaeton alone for she has rheumatism; but she is as crazy about kittens as I am and will be as pleased to hear that this mite has a home."

Holding out her hand a bit timidly, the girl was surprised to have Mrs. Lorraine press it warmly.

"We are very grateful to you, Anna Miller, not only for the kitten but for other things, for changing the current of our thoughts," she said.

The following Sunday, Alice Lorraine appeared at church with Miss Penny and Anna. Her suit was not new but it was more elegant than anything worn in Farleigh. Alice was extremely pretty and had the look of one who has, so to speak, always lain on rose leaves, and Anna felt proud to walk up the aisle with such a distinguished-looking girl. Miss Penny begged her to go home with them after service but Alice wouldn't leave her mother. She walked down to the Hollow the next afternoon, however.

She couldn't stay for tea, but Anna gave her a piece of cake and a cup of chocolate. As Anna walked part way home with her, she spoke of the cake.

"I wish I could cook," she said. "I know nothing

whatever about it, and mother knows only what she learned before she was twelve, and cook-books are such queer things to follow. I don't mind eating tinned things, but it's hard on mother, though she never says anything. And besides,—O Anna, you wouldn't believe it, but I hardly know my mother. At home after I was through with nurses and governesses, she went her way and I mine as everyone seems to do in the city. And now—I care for her more than I ever dreamed, but I don't seem to be able to show it or to take care of her.”

Anna talked it over with Miss Penny that night and on Saturday morning Alice came over and watched Anna make bread, cake and cookies. Miss Penny was in the kitchen the greater part of the time and Alice took to the odd, inconsecutive, warm-hearted little lady as warmly as others had always done, so that on a second Saturday they were like three girls together. Alice began to frequent the house at all hours. And Miss Penny, who was one of the best housewives in the two villages and who had taught Rusty and Anna and through them their mother, gave the girl the best of instruction in cooking and all sorts of domestic matters, besides amusing and entertaining her with other stories than the tale of Reuben and the tramp cat which she gravely related to Alice the first time the two were alone together.

“O Miss Penny, the days fly by as they never did before and I wake so happy every morning that I am

ashamed of myself!" Alice cried one afternoon as she waited for Anna to come from the academy.

'Ashamed, Alice?'

The girl paled. "Yes, Miss Penny, because of my father. You know about him?"

"Yes, dear, I know. At first I was sorry that people in the village should know, but now I really think it best. After all, newcomers are discussed just so much, and—of course there aren't many newcomers now-a-days—not that there ever were many. Anna's family were the last to move into Farleigh before you and your mother. That was when Freddy was a baby—Freddy, you know isn't the one who looks after my pony. That's Frank. He does very well, but of course Reuben taught him, and Rusty's brother—and of course, Anna's—couldn't help doing well. But I felt as if I ought to sell both the cows. It's a pity for Seth Miller with all his work to have to keep the milking in mind. There's only the one cow—Mr. Mudge is keeping the other—and Seth thinks the world of Reuben and knows Reuben would feel terribly to have the other cow disposed of—I don't mean killed of course, though that is the way they speak of killing poor cats and kittens. And that reminds me, Alice. How is yours?"

As Alice would have replied, a peculiar knock sounded on the door. Alice asked if she should answer it. But Miss Penny, whose face had lighted up, said that it was Mr. Langley, and that he would let himself in.

"He raps in a peculiar way—it's really a bar of music. He and Reuben's father always used it. He—O Mr. Langley, how good you are!"

"Good to myself, yes indeed. I am really self-indulgent when I come in here, Miss Penny."

"I appeal to you, Miss Lorraine," he said as he shook hands with the girl. "Do you consider it an act of goodness or the gratification of a desire for refreshment to come to see Miss Penny?"

"It's a case of receiving wholly on my part," asserted Alice with a shy smile for Miss Penny.

"I interrupted a conversation. Pray go on with it and allow me to listen," he begged.

"Dear me, Mr. Langley, I am ashamed to say that for the moment I can't recollect what we were discussing," said Miss Penny in dismay.

Alice smiled, but wanly. "I was telling Miss Penny that I am really too happy, Mr. Langley," she said. "I am happier than I have ever been before. As far back as I can remember, the days were always long, I got tired of everything and was bored the greater part of the time. I cared for nothing but my music, and I never enjoyed that as I do going about with Anna and listening to Miss Penny and learning to make bread and doughnuts. And—there's poor mother at home thinking of—my father. And I—I have to *make* myself think of him."

"But my dear Miss Lorraine, you are doing this in large part for your mother. You are sitting at the feet of Miss Penny in order to learn how to make

one of the most attractive cottages ever built into a real home for her. And while you are broadening your life with these new influences which seem more congenial than those you have known before, no doubt you are enriching your mother's life as well? You tell her of all that takes place, I dare say?"

"Everything. And she is interested and forgets—for a little. And Anna goes in and—mother loves Anna already."

He turned smilingly to Miss Penny. "Anna is more like you, Miss Penny, after all, than any other of your foster children," he said and then went on talking to Alice.

As he rose to take leave, he told Alice he hoped her mother might meet Miss Penny before long. At the door, he kept her a minute.

"Don't feel guilty when you forget your father and don't force yourself to think of him, Miss Lorraine," he said earnestly. "Open your whole heart to the new life and help your mother in her much harder task of reconciling herself to a new future. Write your father, and if he gets the impression he should from your letters, he will conclude that your life isn't going to be spoiled and—why, that will surely make a great difference to him."

There was a blur before the girl's eyes so that she couldn't see the minister's figure at the gate. Instead of returning to the sitting room she stole up stairs for a few minutes of silence in Anna's large, pretty chamber where she was always free to go.

Entering the room, she started at sight of a figure on the bed. As she saw that it was Anna and that her face was buried in the pillow, her heart grew cold. What had happened. Or hadn't anything happened? Was it that, all the while the girl was devoted to other interests than her own, some secret sorrow was eating at her heart?

CHAPTER VII

EARLY the following afternoon Anna Miller made her way to the parsonage.

She announced the fact immediately that she couldn't stay long to-day. For already the clever girl had, as she put it, 'sized up' the lady of the parsonage and knew better than to wait until later and then 'spring' the unwelcome fact upon her.

"O Anna, with all the long week, counting Sunday, and with a long forenoon on Saturday, it seems as if you might spare me Saturday afternoon," protested the invalid.

"I can usually, Mrs. Langley, but you see I am going away Monday morning early and there's my packing and ever so many things to attend to besides going over home, as I always do on Saturday, to see if ma's clothes and pa's ties and shirts and the boys' are in Sunday-go-to-meeting shape," Anna explained.

She waited for Mrs. Langley to ask where she was going or to evince some interest in her journey. Not that she was the sort of person to crave such attention. But the more she saw of Mrs. Langley, the more she realized how self-centered her life had made her. In a certain sense, it wasn't her fault. But for the sake of Mr. Langley, his wife must somehow be

induced to think of other folk or other concerns than herself, her dead baby, and the baby's tombstone. And in that the only person she really had anything to do with was Anna, it would have been encouraging to have her show some faint interest in her comings and goings when they did not lead to the parsonage, or the cemetery on yonder hillside.

But Mrs. Langley's only concern was for her precious Saturday.

"But you will surely be back before the end of the week, Anna?" she asked.

"I suppose I shall," said Anna soberly. "But I may not be able to come here for a fortnight. I shall have a lot of studying to do to make up my work at school."

"Isn't Mr. Langley on the school committee?" demanded his wife.

Wondering at her acquaintance with even so little of current history, Anna told her that he was chairman.

"Very well. Then he can arrange so that you needn't make up the time and you can come here just the same."

"O Mrs. Langley, I don't think he could or would do that, and anyhow I wouldn't have him," Anna protested. "For after all, I'm really crazy about school. I believe I like it all the better for knowing the world a bit. As a matter of fact, you know, I could give Mr. Phillips points. And I couldn't *not* make up certain things. For example, there's the Pelopones-

sian War. The plague began yesterday and,—O dear, like as not when I get back I shall find the whole bunch stark dead. And then there are those poor Helvetians all packed up and ready to hike with their babies and cattle and pups and duds and all,—and those blooming Roman soldiers ready to drive 'em straight back. I've simply *got* to see what happened to them. They had pluck—and yet, I can't for the life of me understand how they had the heart to burn down their houses and their fields of grain. I dare say it showed their faith in God, but they might have wanted to show their grandchildren years afterwards where they had lived.

"I don't remember ever hearing about them. Are they in the Bible, Anna?" Mrs. Langley asked, and before Anna could answer, bade her tell their tale.

Surprised and delighted, the girl complied. Not at all a scholar, Anna Miller nevertheless gleaned all sorts of riches from text books that are desert wastes to the majority of young folk. And now, relating the history of the Helvetians so far as she had followed it, in the graphic account Julius Caesar gives of the unhappy impulse towards migration of these people pent up in an inland island, she made it as interesting as a fairy tale to a child. Mrs. Langley listened spell-bound. And though Anna was disappointed to have her hark back to her usual subject, even the momentary interest in something foreign to it counted for something.

"It must have been hardest of all for them to leave

their graveyards behind them," she murmured, "for mothers to leave their babies' graves."

"And widow's their husbands," Anna added. "And yet, Mrs. Langley, there's worse than that. Now my friend that I am going back to the city to see lost her husband in the summer and now she's sick herself, and there's her baby. If she should—well, it must be no end harder for one to think of dying and leaving one's baby alone in the world than to move away from somewhere and leave the grave of a baby whose soul is all safe."

"Your friend must be older than you, Anna," Mrs. Langley observed irrelevantly.

"Two years, but we were the best of friends. She was at the ribbons with me at Mason and Martin's and Joe was at the soda fountain. He was the nicest boy—and the thinnest! My goodness! Matches would seem as big as the pillars of the Squire Bennet place at Wenham compared with his legs. He and Bessy were married and went to housekeeping in two rooms and were happy as kings. Joe was sick after a while and Bessy came back to work beside me. Then the baby came and Joe went back to work before he was able. He looked so bum they wouldn't have him at the soda fountain but put him in the stock-room where his poor phiz, that looked for all the world like an interrogation point, wouldn't queer the whole concern. It must have been awfully hard for him there, but he stuck it out until last August when he

died. And now poor Bessy thinks she's dying and wants to see me."

"I hate to have you go," said the invalid with some warmth, and even thought to ask who was going with her.

"O, I'm going by my lone. I'm good for it. But I think I will put up my hair so as to look more responsible."

"O Anna, don't do that. I wouldn't have you do that for the world!" cried Mrs. Langley. "I like it just as it is. You see it is just the colour my baby's would have been and I was in hopes hers would be curly, too. I should never have braided hers, though."

Anna forgot that she ought to be on her way home and pulled her braid over her shoulder and looked at it admiringly.

"I wish you would undo it and let me see it all spread out," Mrs. Langley said almost eagerly. And Anna was more than ready to gratify her curiosity.

Untying the bow at the end of the long, heavy, wavy plait, she loosed the strands and spread out the silky yellow mass until it enveloped her like a golden mantle. Mrs. Langley leaned towards her, gazing on the splendour in fascination, reaching out presently to stroke it with her lean witch's fingers. And whenever Anna made a move to gather it in she uttered a cry of protest. And the vain girl yielded and forgot everything except to wish that there were a mirror in the room.

But when the clock struck five, she started, quite

aghast. Seizing her hat and jacket, she said an hasty farewell and fled, the cloud of her hair all about her.

As she went, people rushed to their windows to see the girl's wonderful hair, gazing spell-bound until she was out of sight. Afterwards, when they got their breath, some said the other Miller girl had assurance to flaunt her single charm thus boldly. But no one so took the matter to heart as the Reverend Russell Langley, who met her as he returned from a call at the Hollow.

Anna hadn't time even to pause, and Mr. Langley thought she was ashamed to do so. He took it for granted that the girl had set out from home with this almost immodest splendour of yellow tresses all about her simply to display it, and he felt bewildered and ashamed and grieved. He shook his head sadly. He had known that Anna was vain—everyone knew it. But her vanity had always seemed innocent and harmless, a part of her droll charm. The girl had seemed too unselfish, too eagerly active in behalf of others, to have leisure or desire for deliberate advertising of her own beauty. She was, he had to acknowledge now, quite different from Rusty. He began to understand why people referred to her as the other Miller girl.

Reaching home, he found, after much searching, a sermon on humility he had preached fifteen years before. Putting aside the sermon he had ready for the morrow, he began to revise this. Revision turned out to mean re-writing practically the whole discourse,

and it was midnight before he rose from his desk. The new sermon was less severe and dogmatic than the one of the man of thirty which it replaced, but its tone was wholesome and effective. And though the preacher hoped that Anna Miller would not realise that her vanity had been the occasion of it, he trusted that she would nevertheless take the precepts to heart.

As it was, Anna listened gravely, as she almost invariably did, to every word of the sermon. But she did not forget to flop her yellow braid over her shoulder and as the choir rose to sing, and her sweet, true voice rang out, the girl was not unaware that she was conspicuous for that as well as for her personal appearance.

But she had forgotten all that when she went in to see Mrs. Lorraine that afternoon to thank her for allowing Alice to make it possible for her to go to her friend. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Lorraine had been shocked when Alice came home Friday evening and told her of the offer she had made to take Anna's place at Miss Penny's while she was away. She declared that Alice should not do it. The bitterness which had seemed to disappear had come back, and Alice had been greatly disturbed. Mrs. Lorraine had finally yielded grudgingly, but she felt hurt and injured and there had been a perceptible coolness between mother and daughter since. They had never been close together, but of late they had been nearer to one another than ever before. The more Alice associated with Anna and Miss Penny, the more yearn-

ingly her heart went out towards her mother, and this coldness that was almost estrangement hurt her keenly.

She was grateful that Anna did not feel any want of cordiality in her mother. Mrs. Lorraine received her thanks quietly and when Anna explained the situation listened intently and questioned her sympathetically. And she asked, almost impulsively, if Anna wasn't tired out.

"It's just that I seem pulled so many ways at once, Mrs. Lorraine," Anna said. "Really, I ought not to be at Miss Penny's. With Rusty at college, I ought to be at home. Ma and pa need a daughter there the worst way. I get over all I can, but they're so glad to see me and so sorry to have me go just across the street that it breaks my heart. But someone has to be with Miss Penny. She was goodness itself to Rusty and to the whole family, and I love her as if she were my favorite aunt of all and just love to be with her. And now there's Mrs. Langley. She's queer. Dick's hatband had nothing on her when it comes to being odd. And yet I take to her and would enjoy sort of mothering her if it didn't take me away from Miss Penny and my own family. And then again, there's Mr. Langley."

On a sudden, tears filled the girl's eyes. But she smiled through them.

"It's rum to be so popular, isn't it Alice?" she asked. "Wouldn't you think I was Brother Atlas or

Father Time? The fact is, I'm only the other Miller girl trying to pretend I'm Charley-on-the-spot."

Mrs. Lorraine bent and kissed her. "You are a dear, absurd, unselfish child!" she cried warmly. "And if ever there's anything Alice or I can do to help you out in any way, you must come straight to us. Mustn't she, Alice?"

"Yes, indeed," agreed Alice with shining eyes, and coming to her mother kissed her shyly.

Both girls would have thought that Mrs. Lorraine had unbent as far as possible. But she was to go yet further. On the afternoon of the first day Alice spent with her, Miss Penny had Frank Miller drive her over to Farleigh with the fat pony. She returned with Mrs. Lorraine, whom she had persuaded to visit her as long as Alice stayed. Mrs. Lorraine was as much surprised as her daughter, but somehow, there was no resisting Miss Penny.

She expected to spend the greater part of her time in her chamber, but she did no such thing though she was left free. The housework was inconsiderable. Alice, who took to it strangely, loved to help Miss Penny, who wasn't willing to relinquish the whole. But Mrs. Lorraine found herself wishing to be near the centre of things in the kitchen or living-room and drifted thither before the first forenoon was over. It seemed to her that the very thing her sore heart and worn nerves had craved was to bask in the homely warmth of this simple, cosy household. For the first day she sat in an arm chair with Silvertoes, who had

been included in the invitation, in her lap. But on the second, she felt, after another wonderful night, so much alive that she wished to be active. She said to Miss Penny that she should like to learn to cook—to complete an education in domestic matters begun in her childhood and interrupted by the receipt of a large inheritance which drove her family off the farm. Wherefore, at Miss Penny's suggestion, Alice was sent off nutting, and the two women had a long, happy morning together.

An inborn taste for the domestic and a really good foundation made Mrs. Lorraine a still readier pupil than her daughter had been. Miss Penny's surprise at her skill drew forth a longer account of Mrs. Lorraine's early life. Miss Penny spoke of her own girlhood and other forgotten details came back to her guest. And when Alice returned at noon of the second day, she could scarcely credit what she saw and felt. Her mother and Miss Penny appeared to be warm friends.

Anna had already taught Alice to love the out-of-doors, and though it was less pleasant alone, she took advantage of her opportunity and remained out all that she could, believing that her mother and Miss Penny's friendship would progress the more rapidly in her absence. Mr. Langley called one day, and Mrs. Lorraine saw him and liked him. She told her daughter what he had said of Richard Cartwright, the man who had built their cottage, and expressed apprehension that he might find a bare-looking place when

he should call. Whereupon it came to Alice that she might do something to make it look more attractive before they returned to it.

She went over next day. As she sauntered towards Farleigh, she thought of the man who had died before he had attained his heart's desire. She did not think of him as Reuben's father except to wish that every one wouldn't dwell so constantly upon the son as never to drop any hint to gratify her hungry, rather mournful curiosity concerning the father.

He and Mr. Langley had been intimate friends, so that Mr. Langley would be able to tell one all about him. Alice was pleased to reflect that since her mother had met and liked Mr. Langley there was no bar against her becoming more friendly with him. She wondered how long she must wait before she should feel free to question him concerning Richard Cartwright. The girl sighed as it came to her that he, too, would most likely insist upon talking about Reuben instead. She would probably hear the famous tale of the cat in the primeval pine tree again and other less familiar incidents connected with the model youth; but surely after he had exhausted the list—and she would be patience itself—he would be ready to speak of the older and more interesting Cartwright.

The outline of the cottage was charmingly picturesque. As Alice turned into the lane to-day it struck her afresh and more strongly than ever. As a matter of fact, it was the first time she had approached

it when her heart had not been burdened with the sense of her mother's unhappiness. Relieved of that burden, dimly aware, indeed, of her mother's very pleasant preoccupation and quite forgetting her father, who had always been a stranger to her, Alice saw with new eyes and sped on with a light step and a sense of well-being that she had never known before.

The little porch with settees built in invited the comer to pause to contemplate the outlook. Alice had never before had leisure to heed or even to feel the invitation, but to-day she accepted gratefully. Throwing herself down, she gazed happily out through a break in the wall of foliage bordering the lane to the distant hills. But very shortly, content changed to vague melancholy which became poignant. The lilac and blue of those lovely folded hills convinced her that Dick Cartwright had had even that in mind when he planned this cottage and this porch. And he must have sat here where she was sitting now on many a day at sunset and in the early dusk and under the evening stars thinking of the organ, which must have seemed to come nearer and nearer, and dreaming out melodies to play thereon.

The girl clasped her hands. How terribly sad his fate had been! He had lost everything and died and been forgotten. Perhaps if he had had the organ to comfort him, he wouldn't have felt the death of his wife so desperately, and wouldn't have taken to drink and met his death. If only someone had given it to him! There were so many people in the world to

whom the cost of a pipe organ would have meant little or nothing. Why, once her own father could have given away any number of them easier than she and her mother could dispense coppers to-day. She could have done it herself.

Well, there was nothing to do now except to make some atonement for the cruel fate that had come upon Richard Cartwright. It wasn't her fault, but it might have been, and the least she could do would be to make whatever amends might be possible now. Being the daughter of a convict, she would of course never marry, and she would devote her life to the memory of this genius who had died betimes. She would fulfil her duty to her mother but all her leisure thought and time and money (she would earn some in a manner to be determined later) would go towards reviving his memory and keeping it green. She would build the organ just as he had planned and then—why not turn the cottage into a sort of museum—the Richard Cartwright Memorial? Or perhaps better than a museum, it might be a kind of musical centre where famous organists would give concerts in his memory to the people of the countryside who hadn't appreciated him in life and where poor young men might come to practise and improvise.

Immensely cheered, Alice took the keys from the pocket of her jacket to enter the cottage and see if the whole lower floor could be made into one apartment. But in her eagerness, she put the wrong key in the lock. The second key, marked *Shop* opened

a small separate building hidden in the shrubbery in the rear. There was a shop at Miss Penny's too, and she had said every house had had one in her girlhood, and this one, which did not match the cottage, evidently belonged to an earlier dwelling. It occurred suddenly to Alice that she might find something there belonging to Dick Cartwright, some memorials to be put behind glass in a cabinet near the organ.

The sun had dropped below the horizon, but the girl felt she could make an hurried survey before dusk—indeed, she must. She ran quickly through the thicket to the door of the shop and succeeded in turning the key in the rusty lock. She stole softly in, awe rather than dread hushing her steps.

The first view was disappointnig. The place was piled full of old boxes and crates and stacks of yellowed newspapers. But in the corner she caught glimpses of odd chairs and stands and bits of furniture which might prove of interest if one could ever get at them. A narrow stairway with ladder-like ascent told her what a more observant person would have implied from the window in the gable above the door—that there was a second storey.

Catching her skirts in her hand, Alice climbed up. Her spirits rose the moment her head cleared the railing above. She stepped directly into a little chamber which had not been converted into a store room or dumping ground and stood still to gaze about. It must have been left as it was when Dick Cartwright went away.

There was a long carpenter's bench with an iron contrivance fastened at the end on one long side, and a smaller table opposite containing rusty tins with a swinging shelf above holding buckets that had once contained paint. A stand and a rocking-chair stood near the window at the further end and a dark bench or couch was drawn into the shadow of the rafters. A secretary with drawers below the writing shelf and shelves above with glass doors stood near the other window which looked towards the house. A chair stood before it—how many years had it stood there?—and careless of dust, Alice seated herself in it.

The glass doors were open. A few old, mildewed books stood on the shelves. They might form a nucleus of the memorial library, but Alice Lorraine sighed. For the nonce she had forgotten that Dick Cartwright was dead. Half mechanically she pulled out one of the little drawers below. A pile of letters met her view. The uppermost bore a superscription. Either dusk or faded ink made it very faint, but the girl read it—Mr. Richard Cartwright, Farleigh. They seemed to her the saddest words she had ever read.

Forgetting everything else, the girl sat by the desk while the shadows in the corners increased, encroaching more and more upon her island of twilight. Then on a sudden, strange, nameless terror seized upon her. She felt as she had once or twice felt in the night upon awaking without apparent cause from sound sleep. Her hair seemed to rise from her head and cold drops stood out on her brow and lips.

There was someone else in the room! For some seconds the girl sat motionless, fearing to stir, to draw breath. Then she turned her head ever so slightly and cautiously to see how near she was to the stair. Two steps would bring her thither. She gazed as in fascination upon the space for some moments, then slowly, breathlessly turned her head in the opposite direction.

Nothing met her gaze and she grew bolder—or at least less fearful. Turning about in the chair, though noiselessly, she surveyed the room. There was nothing to be seen. She peered in every direction. The corners were dark but not suspiciously so. It seemed as if there were something odd about the look of the couch, but she could reach the stairway, rush down and be out of the door before anyone or anything could reach her thence. She rose softly to her feet.

For a little she stood still. Then she tiptoed quietly towards the dark bench or couch beneath the rafters, peering before her all the while. Suddenly she paused.

Her horror-stricken eyes made out the outlines of a dark figure on the couch, an human being, a man who looked to her frightened gaze of giant size. His eyes were closed. He was asleep—or dead?

Alice Lorraine stood still trying to think. If the man were asleep, he was a drunken tramp and she must flee. If he were dead—O, so much more must she fly! Not for the world would she be alone with a dead man, a corpse. She must——

On a sudden the figure moved. The man's eyes opened wide.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE the man on the old couch realized the actuality of the situation and sprang to his feet, his bewildered, incredulous eyes took in perforce the vision of a tall, graceful young girl with dark bands of hair wound about her small head and dark brows and eyes conspicuous in the dusk because of the pallor of her face. But pale as she was, and weak and faint and confused, Alice Lorraine's fear took flight almost immediately. The first movement of the unknown man startled only to reassure her. He sprang to his feet, but only to shrink back into the corner as if to allow her to fly if she would.

He waited a moment for that before he spoke. In the inconsiderable interval, Alice, shaken as she was, saw the man so clearly that she could have given a fairly accurate description of him if she had never seen him thereafter. She saw that he was tall, thin and gaunt, but that his face, worn as it was, was almost the face of a boy. That must have been because of his eyes, which were deep set and wide apart, not large nor dark of colour but at once shy, kind and appealing. As he started to speak, it came to the girl that he was the very image of the man upon whom her thoughts had been dwelling from the moment of

her leaving the Hollow, except that he was thinner, more worn, older (save for his eyes) and much more shabby. But gaunt as the man was, he was no ghost.

"I beg your pardon. I must have frightened you," he murmured in a gentle, deprecatory voice which would have been exactly the right sort of voice for the dead musician and which would of itself have reassured Alice had the dusk been so deep as to veil the kindness of his countenance.

"I was—startled," the girl gasped. "I didn't know—I never dreamed——"

"Of course you didn't. It was unpardonable in me," he declared. "But I believed the house yonder was unoccupied. There was no one there all yesterday and no light at night. I could see that there had been someone living there, but I supposed whoever it was had gone—*vamoused* as we say in the West. I wouldn't however,—at least I hope I wouldn't have tried to enter that in any case. But I know this old shop as a boy and I couldn't resist making an attempt to get in here. Then—I got to thinking of old times and—I have walked many miles during the last week—I threw myself down on the old lounge and fell asleep."

He raised his eyes almost ingenuously to her, for the moment a shy boy.

"I hate to think what a sad shock it must have been to you coming upon me so," he said contritely. "You look ready to drop. Won't you sit down? The

chair over yonder by the stair railing is all right for I dusted it with my pocket handkerchief."

"Thank you," the girl faltered, "but——"

He understood. "Naturally you would like to get out of here right away? May I help you down? The stairway is steep and narrow and it is dark below. But perhaps you would rather go alone?"

The girl's heart throbbed strangely.

"I should like to get out into the air," she said. "I can get down all right, but——"

"May I come after and—explain myself?" he asked. "I want you to understand and to feel safe from further shocks of the sort."

She murmured a confused affirmative and started to feel her way down.

"Do you mind my shining a light?" he asked. "I have an electric flash-light in my pocket, but please don't think me a professional burglar for all that."

Alice tried to laugh, though she was still shaken. He lighted her down and out, took her key, locked the door and handed it back to her.

"You live in the house?" he asked.

Alice explained that she lived there with her mother but that they were visiting in the part of the village called South Hollow. She knew that she shouldn't be saying this to a stranger whom she had found in the upper storey of the shop; but for herself she felt that there are strangers and strangers.

"I know the Hollow," he said. "I lived about here as a boy. Are you going back now?"

Alice replied that she ought to be, but that she felt as if she must sit down for a little first and would go up to the porch. He accompanied her thither and asked if he might wait. And when she gave the desired permission, he suggested that she get herself a wrap from the house. As she complied with the suggestion, the girl seemed to feel her mother's horror. He unlocked the door for her and waited on the walk below. When she came out and dropped down upon one settee, he seated himself opposite.

"I want to apologise for my thoughtlessness which might have had serious consequences," he said quietly. "And I give you my word that I will not come near the place again so that you needn't feel nervous about coming in at any time. And—neither need your mother. I suppose you will tell her?"

"No, I don't think I will," said the girl slowly. "It would frighten her unnecessarily and what's the use?"

"None if you feel so," he said. "I confess that I shall be very glad if you do not, though I wouldn't stand in the way of your doing so if you feel it right. As a matter of fact, I don't want anyone to know I am about here—or that anyone is about who is not here ordinarily."

"I won't mention it," she said.

"You are very good," he returned simply.

For a little there was silence between them. Then he spoke.

"I really want to stay about for a little," he began deprecatingly. "I have only just come, and—perhaps

you wouldn't mind if I promise to keep away from here? I have been away a long time. All sorts of things have happened to me in the interval and also, I daresay, to the people in Farleigh I used to know. I am living and working in the Middle West. I saved up money to take a vacation and come East and look around. I don't want people to see me but I want to try to see some of those I used to think a lot of. You will believe me, won't you, when I say that I have no other purpose in mind?"

"Of course I will," the girl cried warmly.

"Thank you. It might well look queer to you for me to be skulking about, but I simply cannot let anyone know anything about me, and yet I long above all things to find out about old friends—who is alive and—and all that. I thought it would be simple, for it is a very long time and I have changed so that I felt I was safe. But I came upon a drummer in New York who had known me only slightly and he recognised me. That took away my nerve. I couldn't bluff now. So there's nothing to do but to spy around nights. I can only see who's here and who——"

"If you don't see them you won't think they're dead?" protested the girl.

"The ones I care for would be dead if they weren't here," he said quietly.

He said this so exactly as Dick Cartwright would have said it, that it came to Alice Lorraine that it was not unlikely that he was a relative of the dead man. He looked enough like him—or like the image in Alice's

mind which people who had known him had furnished material for—to be his brother. He wasn't old enough to be his father nor young enough to be his son. Suppose it was really Dick Cartwright that the stranger had gone through so much to come and look up? How terribly sad to find him dead! But if that should be the case, it would, perhaps, be the kindest thing to tell him at once. As she felt for words to introduce the subject, it came to the girl that he would feel somewhat comforted to hear of her idea of a memorial.

"I wonder," she began almost eagerly, then started again quietly. "The man that built this house—the shop was built years earlier, they tell me—he was—I wonder if he was here in your day? His name was Richard Cartwright."

"O yes, I knew Cartwright," he returned not at all enthusiastically.

"You may not have heard—that he is dead?" she said softly.

"I understood he was. He came to a bad end, I believe?"

"A sad end," she amended with a trace of indignation. "He was killed in a railway accident."

"But he was himself a wreck long before that, I believe," he remarked. "However, you, being a stranger, would not have heard I suppose. If you hadn't come to live in his house, you would never have heard of him at all and then only because it is a crazy-built house."

"It's a charming house," the girl declared.

"It is attractive to look at," he agreed, peering through the dusk. "But—he is pretty well forgotten by this time, I dare say?"

"Well, if he is, it isn't fair! It isn't fair at all!" she cried.

He had nothing to say.

"Mr. Langley, the minister, whom everybody looks up to, thought ever so much of Mr. Cartwright. I don't believe he has forgotten him," she asserted.

"Mr. Langley! You know Mr. Langley!" he exclaimed. "O tell me of him, please."

"I have only seen him to speak to him once. But he is—O very impressive—I mean you take to him and feel he's wonderful just as those who have always known him do."

"How does he look? But I shall see him. I must. I'll see him to-night. Does—but I ought not to let you stay here longer. It's dark already. My name is John Converse. May I ask to whom I am indebted for this kindness?"

"I am Alice Lorraine," she said rising reluctantly.

He asked if he might walk to the Hollow with her. The girl hesitated, wondering if it were safe for him.

"I am sorry I am so shabby, Miss Lorraine," he said. "I have decent clothes over at Marsden Bridge where I am staying—I didn't dare risk Wenham—but I am less likely to be recognized in these."

They set out at once. But they had gone only a few rods beyond the lane when the sound of light

footsteps came clearly to them in the absolute stillness of the damp autumn evening.

"That's Mr. Langley," he said quietly. "I'll have to leave you. He's the one person I dare not meet even in black night."

"O wait!" begged Alice in agonised whisper, panic stricken at the thought that she would never see him again. But at that moment a dark figure appeared in sight. Alice pressed the keys into the stranger's hand. "Tomorrow at four. I'll come to the shop," she whispered. John Converse disappeared into the bushes by the roadside.

It was barely a minute before Mr. Langley had stopped and was calling her by name.

"Why Miss Lorraine, is it indeed you?" he cried, surprised to see the girl out alone after dark. He bade her come back as far as the Smiths' with him that he might get their horse and drive her back to Miss Penny's, giving her no opportunity to refuse.

They were hardly in the carriage when Alice turned to the minister.

"Mr. Langley, I heard lately of a man returning to his birthplace after years of absence longing to find out all about the friends of his boyhood and to see them if he could do it secretly. How would you account for such a thing?"

Though Mr. Langley was quite accustomed to being bombarded with odd questions, sometimes hypothetical, sometimes otherwise, he hesitated now. He could not say to this girl whose father was in prison that the

obvious solution of her problem was that the man had committed a crime and was a fugitive from justice or was ashamed of his record. But before the pause became awkward an happy suggestion came to his mind.

"Well, it might be another case of Enoch Arden," he said. "This man might have been missing for so long that he had been taken for dead. That used to be very common in sea-faring places and among sea-faring people. His wife or sweet-heart may have married another. Or I can imagine a man being unwilling to make himself known when relatives have come into possession of his more material property."

Alice's heart leaped. She remembered Enoch Arden only vaguely, but enough to feel a thrill at her heart at the thought of re-reading it in her bed that night. There was a copy of Tennyson's complete poems in the book-case of the room she occupied—which was Reuben's old room.

The Smiths' horse was a fine, strong creature which did not get sufficient exercise, but he didn't fancy starting out just at supper time any more than Miss Penny's fat pony, and he showed his reluctance plainly. It came to Alice that this was her chance to find out more of Richard Cartwright. She had said she would seize her first opportunity. Besides, Mr. Converse had spoken slightly of him. It wouldn't be bad to have Mr. Langley's own word as to his respect and admiration for the dead genius.

"O Mr. Langley, I have—well living in the cottage

where he lived I suppose it is natural for me to wonder about Mr. Cartwright," she observed. "But—no one seems to have anything to say about him. Of course, he can't be forgotten?"

"His son has rather overshadowed Cartwright's memory," Mr. Langley remarked quietly.

"One certainly hears enough of *him*," the girl remarked.

"O Miss Lorraine, I hope you and your mother aren't getting the impression that Reuben is anything of a prig," he protested, "for he isn't. He is—well, he is four-square, that boy is, Miss Lorraine, and I am happy to think that you will see him and judge for yourself in the Christmas holidays."

"I shall be pleased, I'm sure," she murmured conventionally. "But I can't help being more interested in the father,—being so musical and wanting a pipe organ in his house and dying before it ever came to him. You knew him well, Mr. Langley?"

"Yes, I knew—and loved the man well," he said sadly. "He was a charming fellow, the best of companions and friends."

"And he played—well?"

"To me he seemed almost a genius," he replied, and Alice heard herself repeating it triumphantly to John Converse.

"And yet—people have forgotten him already!" she exclaimed. "One would think—O Mr. Langley, has there ever been any idea of a memorial for him here in Farleigh?"

"O no, nothing of the kind," he said in some surprise.

"But don't you think there should be?" she cried.

"In his case, I think it is better as it is," he said.

Alice's heart sank. O dear, how terribly strict Mr. Langley was!

"You mean because he drank?" she asked.

"No, I didn't mean that," he said slowly. "I believe his taking to drink as he did shows weakness, but I cannot judge Dick Cartwright too severely for that. His artistic temperament made him different. Grief was truly more terrible to him and temptation stronger than to less gifted mortals. And when he went away and deserted his little son he was hardly a responsible person."

Alice was silent until lights twinkling in the Hollow reminded her that she had only a few minutes. "But surely, Mr. Langley, you wouldn't have him forgotten?" she asked.

Mr. Langley realised that Alice Lorraine was a girl of some force. She was apparently intent upon obtaining justice to Dick Cartwright's memory—which must not be.

"It's this way, Miss Lorraine,—for I am going to tell you something in strict confidence. It is for the best that Richard Cartwright be forgotten save in the minds of a few friends. He died in a railway wreck, it is true, but he was not an innocent victim. I myself thought him to have been at first. I wrote to a friend in Chicago hoping he might secure details which might be of comfort to Cartwright's friends and later to

Reuben. But I regretted my action. My friend learned that Cartwright had turned ruffian and desperado. He was a member of a gang that killed the mail clerk and the engineer and thus wrecked the train."

He sighed. He didn't say that if Cartwright had not been killed he would to-day be serving life sentence in prison with others of the gang who had escaped. But he felt compelled to add: "I dislike to believe it and do not, but one of the men said that Cartwright fired the shot that killed the mail clerk. So I do not wish any attempt to revive the remembrance of Reuben's father."

"Of course not," cried Alice. "I understand, and—thank you, Mr. Langley. I am sorry to have awakened sad memories for you."

The house was in darkness but Alice did not mind that. Relieved at the absence of Miss Penny and her mother she rushed upstairs and removing her wraps threw herself on the bed, her thoughts a wild chaos. She did not know how long she had been there when she heard her name called from below.

Going down, she found Anna's brother Frank who had lighted the lamp.

"I guess you were scared about your mother and Miss Penny," the boy said sympathetically, gazing at her white face. "They thought you'd be, but they clean forgot. They're over to our house. Anna's come home and—something terrible's happened to her!"

CHAPTER IX

ON the afternoon following Alice Lorraine's strange adventure, Mr. Langley sat at his study window gazing out over the pickets of the paling towards the bushes and scrub trees which marked the line of the river, but which, being mainly oaks, still hid the stream itself from view. He was ready for Sunday even to the point of having tidied his desk so that it looked unfamiliar. He was conscious—vaguely conscious—of working better and more easily of late—with more spirit. It might be that it was only a sort of rebound after the period of depression into which he had fallen when someone had reminded him of the fact that Ella May, whom he had always thought of as a little girl, would now have been a woman grown, older than her mother had been at her birth, and he had lost the child-companion of his thoughts and wanderings. Even so, something must have happened from without himself to pull him out of that slough. That something was, of course, connected with his wife's new interest in life—at least in so much of life as was represented by the other Miller girl.

It was probably recollection of Anna that made him think at first glance that the figure coming along the

avenue at a distance beyond the lane was Anna, but, looking again, he saw that it was someone else—one of the grammar school children, he fancied, though he couldn't seem to place her. He didn't try long, for as his eyes dwelt upon that particular spot, something disconcerting came suddenly to him. Last evening as he had walked slowly homewards just before full darkness, he had looked up at this point to see approaching him the figures of a man and woman or youth and maiden whom one glance showed to be intensely interested in one another or in a common subject and who seemed to be strangers to him. Then he had utterly forgotten them. For he had been arrested by a loud chattering in a tree at the roadside and had gone to see why a squirrel should be awake at that time of day. Then, walking on, he had met Alice Lorraine. She was alone, but—the minister shook his head. It seemed now to him that the figure of the girl he had seen walking with the strange man was Alice Lorraine.

And yet—it couldn't be. The man and woman weren't figments of his imagination, he was sure of that. They must, however, have turned back at that point for some reason. And quite likely he had stood looking for and calling to the squirrel longer than he had realised and Alice had come along meantime.

The click of his gate recalled his thoughts sharply. On a sudden the man sat erect and stared—almost glared at the strange yet familiar figure he saw coming slowly up the flagged walk. For an instant he could not believe it—could not credit the evidence of his

eyes. Then he recollected the preceding Saturday and—O, that sermon of Sunday! And he groaned within his heart. Had that child been so affected as to sacrifice her vanity thus? It was worse than absurd. It was cruel, monstrous!

He went to the door to let her in.

"Anna, take off your hat," he bade her, his voice stern through repressed feeling.

Obediently, Anna Miller stood before him with downcast eyes. She looked like a boy,—a handsome lad of perhaps a dozen years. Her long yellow hair had been shorn. Parted at one side, the thick, short unruly locks curled about her peaked face and pipe-stem neck, emphasizing the childish delicacy of her features, the long curling eyelashes and the sweet curve of her mouth. Later Mr. Langley realised this, and the fact that though Anna looked younger, she had somehow quite lost whatever it was in expression or countenance that likened her to a doll. He, who had never acknowledged that likeness while it existed, became aware of it after it had been displaced by something else. But at the moment the loss seemed irreparable and entire; the hard ugly fact seemed quite without extenuation.

With an effort the girl raised her eyes and smiled.

"I wonder if Mrs. Langley wants to see me?" she asked.

"She always wants to see you, Anna," he returned half absently, frowning unconsciously. But as she made a move to go in, he arrested her.

"Why have you done this foolish thing, tell me, child!" he demanded reproachfully.

"Because—well—" Anna choked—"Honestly, Mr. Langley, I *can't* tell you now," she faltered. "Ma cried and Miss Penny and even Mrs. Lorraine, and Pa took to the wood-pile. It's only—a sort of a joke."

"A poor sort of joke, it seems to me," he remarked and betook himself to his study.

Mrs. Langley cried, too. But whereas one would have deprecated Anna's mother's tears and Miss Penny's, it was probably good for Mrs. Langley to forget herself for the moment and be really moved by something beyond her immediate narrow horizon. It was, perhaps, fortunate for her that after all those arid, selfish years she had tears of sympathy to weep.

Anna found her looking better. Since the girl had begun to visit her, Mrs. Langley had slept at night and suffered less and less pain during the day. This afternoon she wore an old-fashioned lace fichu over her ugly Mother Hubbard gown which so relieved the sharpness of her face and the yellow tone of her skin, that Anna had no hesitation in kissing her when she saw that it was expected of her.

But as she stood before her, suddenly Mrs. Langley raised both hands and cried out.

"Anna Miller! Your lovely hair!" she exclaimed incredulously, "you've had it all cut off!" And covering her face with her hands she began to weep.

Anna, who had had a hard week and a difficult home-coming, was startled and distressed. She stood

quite still with tightly clasped hands. It might kill an invalid to cry like that. If they knew, they would never let her in again. What if Big Bell should come in now—or Mr. Langley? How angry he would be! Anna hadn't supposed he had it in him until she had heard his voice to-day. He was probably thinking then that it would be a shock to his wife, and that she was a hateful thing not to have thought of it.

Poor Mrs. Langley! Her shoulders were shaking. Anna went closer and put her arm about her gently.

"Don't cry. Don't feel badly about me, Mrs. Langley," she begged softly. "It'll grow out again. I'm awfully sorry, but honest and true, I couldn't help it."

Mrs. Langley uncovered her face.

"Couldn't help it?" she repeated wonderingly, adding with more spirit than she had ever exhibited before since Anna had known her. "Do you mean that someone cut it off by force and stole it? O, Anna, if they did that, I'll have Mr. Langley put them in prison right away!"

Anna couldn't help laughing. But she said to herself it wasn't bad for Mrs. Langley to believe her husband was Charley-on-the-spot, whether he really was or not.

"Well, no'm, not just that," she said, "but——"

"But what?" demanded the invalid rather sharply.

"I haven't told anyone yet," replied Anna softly. "I just let them think that I—just did it, you know, and that I like it better. I thought they wouldn't mind

so much as if they really knew. But I'll tell you if you want me to."

Mrs. Langley gazed at the girl wonderingly. Anna was pale and there were bluish shadows under her eyes which looked very big and rather wistful to-day. Already Mrs. Langley began to feel that if she could but forget that shimmering mass of gold about her shoulders of a week since, she might like her even better as she was now. The short locks curled so gracefully and stood out so picturesquely about her little face and slender throat that her head was like a bright, loose-petalled flower upon its stem.

"Do tell me about it, Anna, if you're not too tired," she said wistfully, endeavoring rather vainly to soften her harsh voice. "No, don't sit there, poor child. You shall have this soft rocking chair for your sharp little bones." And before Anna realised what she was doing, she had risen and forced the girl into her own padded rocker.

Of course Anna would not keep it, but she drew another close. She rather shrank from making the explanation; but she said to herself sagely that it might do Mrs. Langley good to hear it, and it might forward a certain scheme she had in mind—a wonderful plan that was to crown all her endeavors and make everyone happy. Apparently it hadn't hurt her to cry, for she had hopped out of that rocking chair and whisked her into it as nimbly and neatly as any strong person could have done. *She should worry!*

"Well, Mrs. Langley, you see I found my friend

Bessy very bad off," she began. "It was all very sad because Joe her husband wasn't long dead, and there was the baby, little Joe, Junior, and her chum Hazel sticking by her through everything and supposing she had lost her job, though they took her back again. I slept with Hazel Monday night and woke up towards morning and found her crying. It seemed that Bessy had enough laid up to bury her; but she'd been sick so long that Hazel had just had to break into it, what with medicine and the baby's milk, and of course she had to have something to eat herself or she couldn't have done for Bessy. And here it was almost gone, and Bessy didn't know it had been touched, and was feeling so secure about it. You might not think anyone would mind, Mrs. Langley, but there's something frightful in the idea of being buried by charity."

"I suppose so," Mrs. Langley assented absently.

"Charity down there doesn't mean what it does with us, you see,—public charity isn't like the charity of the Bible, you know."

Mrs. Langley nodded impatiently.

"Well, I managed to get Hazel chirked up so that she went to sleep, and I lay staring at the smoky ceiling and wondering what to do. Then suddenly I had a hunch. And the very first thing in the morning I went down to Mason and Martin's and talked with a woman in the hair goods I used to know that had first put me wise about such things. She gave me a tip and the people she sent me to offered me sixty-five dollars for my hair—the braid was almost a yard long and

about as thick at one end as at the other, you know. Then I went back and told Hazel I could get sixty-five dollars for her at any moment. She thought it was a diamond ring or family jewels I could put in soak, which wouldn't of course mean much at a time like that, and she cheered right up. And Bessy seemed to feel a change and to be really better, and we all talked about old times in the store and laughed a lot. But that was Bessy's last day. She died in the night. In the morning I went down—and got the money."

Unconsciously the girl drew a deep sigh even as she forced a little plaintive smile. Mrs. Langley sighed yet more deeply. She wasn't sufficiently practical to ask any of the obvious questions or to suggest the alternatives with which others were to confront and confound the girl even though they were quite futile now that the deed was done.

"It was good of you, Anna,—it was a beautiful thing to do," she acknowledged, "only I am afraid you will be sorry."

"I should worry. It will be good for me, and a lot less strain on the looking glasses," the girl owned, shrugging her shoulders. "And anyhow, Mrs. Langley, I never could be sorry, after seeing real things like I saw there: Bessy only barely two years older than I and Hazel just my age, and—O, I'm so thankful it was so long and not thin and that I had sense to think of it in time. Honest and true, I don't believe I could ever be happy again or sleep nights if we had had to

call in—outsiders. But you never could understand that without being right there.”

Mrs. Langley sighed again.

“Of course I shall sort of miss it,” Anna rattled on. “I used to brush it at night, have it all over me, you know, and Rusty would tease me. And I simply loved the feel of that fat braid flopping about. But it’s just as well, for I sha’n’t have so much time now.”

“You look—O, Anna, at this moment you look just as my baby would have looked when she began to run about!” cried Mrs. Langley almost enthusiastically. “But please don’t put on your hat now. You have only just come.”

“I really must. Ma thought I ought not to come at all, but I felt as if I must get it over—about my hair, you know.”

“Then you’re staying at home,” remarked Mrs. Langley with her occasional acuteness as to the present moment. “When do you go back to Miss Penny?”

The girl hesitated. “Not for some little time, Mrs. Langley.”

It would have seemed that Mrs. Langley *must* have asked the desired question. But the invalid was thinking of herself.

“O Anna, how very nice! You won’t be nearly so busy, then, and can get over here oftener. I wish you would come regularly in the middle of the week, too. Can you?” she asked promptly.

Anna sighed. “The fact is, I’m going to be a heap busier—that’s why I’m staying at home,” she returned

obscurely. "But Mrs. Langley, some of the ladies would just love to drop in to see you."

"Anna Miller, I don't know what you are thinking of," Mrs. Langley complained feebly, falling back in her chair. "I have been an invalid since my baby died. I couldn't endure seeing anyone."

"You see me."

"That's very different. Besides, you took an interest in my baby's grace. No one else did that. Even the baby's father——"

"O Mrs. Langley," Anna interrupted quickly, "Mr. Langley doesn't—he's a real true-blue Christian, you know. He doesn't think of Ella May as dead, and so——"

"Never mind that. But I wish that if you aren't going back to Miss Penny's you'd come right here and stay all the time."

Anna could scarcely restrain a groan. "I'm needed at home," she said briefly and drew her jacket together. But after all, the real business of her call hadn't been touched upon.

"You knew that there was a baby, too—little Joe, Junior?" she asked.

Mrs. Langley assented without interest.

"He was left pretty much alone, poor little lamb, wasn't he?"

"I suppose the girl Hazel would look after him?"

Anna's eyes flashed. "She makes seven dollars and a half a week—that's every penny she has to live on. Even if she could work with him on her hands, she

couldn't buy his milk with what was left each week."

"O, I see. I suppose she will put him in an orphan asylum?"

"Orphan asylum nothing!" cried Anna and waited a minute. Then as Mrs. Langley did not speak she said casually: "I brought him home with me."

Mrs. Langley sat up straight. "Anna Miller!" she exclaimed.

"There was nothing else to do and anyhow I wanted to. The little beggar needs fresh air and sunshine and—Farleigh."

"You don't mean that you're giong to keep him?" Mrs. Langley protested.

Anna's heart sank. She had truly decided to bring the baby home because there had seemed no alternative. But no sooner was she out of the sadness and confusion and settled in the train than she had realised the fitness, the inevitability of her action. She was bringing the baby straight to Mrs. Langley. A baby was exactly what Mrs. Langley needed and wanted and what Mr. Langley would enjoy most of anything. If she had chosen, she would probably have had a girl, but she wasn't sure that that wouldn't have been a mistake. And though Anna, who was wild over all young creatures, was attached to little Joe already, she decided to hand him over to Mrs. Langley as soon as the transfer could be affected. But even before she had come to the parsonage to-day, she had realised that it wasn't altogether the simple matter it would seem to be and that it wasn't to be accomplished with-

out finesse. Still she had expected one visit to finish the negotiations,—and she had nearly missed mentioning it at all!

"I hardly know," she faltered. "That is, I'm going to keep him of course until I find a good home for him. I'd like to keep him always only—ma wasn't so tremendously pleased to have him added to her family, and of course I wouldn't have dreamed of taking him to Miss Penny's though she would have taken him in forever if I had said the word. However, I own that it was something of a surprise to ma—springing the baby on her at the same time she saw my Sampson-Delilah hair-cut. But heaps of people would give their heads to get a nice baby ready-made just at the cunning age, or nearly, and with the worst of his teething over."

She waited anxiously. Mrs. Langley only stared at her.

"People that haven't any children or people that have lost children,—lost them when they were babies, ought to jump at such a chance," she went on, longing to have Mrs. Langley ask some question, however reluctantly, concerning the child. But the invalid held up a protesting hand.

"Anna! I would never have believed that you would speak in that unfeeling way about—the loss of a baby!" she cried.

"I didn't mean to," said Anna quickly. "I just wanted—perhaps Mr. Langley might know of some good home where they would take in the little fellow.

Would you mind telling him about little Joe and asking him?"

"Mind! Of course I would mind, Anna Miller! I—I never could get through it!"

"Then I suppose I shall have to see him myself," remarked Anna tentatively.

"Anna, Mr. Langley is an overworked man," said his wife rather surprisingly. "He has a great deal to do as chairman of the school committee, besides all his church business. Don't go to him with any such thing as that. And—O Anna, don't say anything more about it to me. Don't mention the matter at all when you come next Saturday—or Wednesday, if you can come on Wednesday. I'm all upset."

CHAPTER X

IN the confusion and excitement which prevailed at the two houses in the South Hollow in which this narrative is concerned, Alice Lorraine's secret perturbation either remained unnoticed or was attributed to the cause which affected them all. But very shortly Mrs. Lorraine, who had come out of her shell almost unbelievably in her week of companionship with Miss Penny, so that now in the crisis she was a very tower of strength not only to Miss Penny but to the Miller household as well, began to be greatly troubled by her daughter's demeanour. She had rejoiced at the manner in which the girl had bloomed under Anna's influence, and had been amazed not only at her capacity for learning and power of adaptibility but at the generous warmth and sweetness of her nature. She had believed that a real transformation had taken place. Wherefore she was the more disappointed to discover that, at a moment of crisis, Alice really wasn't the useful, helpful, sympathetic, understanding girl she had seemed. Anna's arrival, shorn of her wonderful hair and accompanied by the strange, unattractive, almost uncanny baby, had upset Miss Penny's household and all but devastated the Millers'. And Alice, who might have cheered the former immensely and

have been of great service in restoring equanimity to the other, seemed completely unstrung by the excitement and a subject rather than a source of aid.

On Saturday morning, when she caught sight of Alice, who supposed herself alone, wringing her hands as she stood by a window of the living-room looking north, Mrs. Lorraine sighed and said to herself, in Anna's expressive phrase, that it seemed to be 'up to' her. And summoning all her powers, some of which had been awakened of late and others which had lain dormant almost all her life, Henrietta Lorraine started in good earnest to bring some sort of order out of chaos.

She began with Miss Penny. It did not take long to reconcile that philosophical and optimistic little lady to the loss of the yard of silken tresses; and after a bit Mrs. Lorraine convinced her that Anna would soon pick up again now that she was at home, would regain at least as many pounds as she seemed to have lost, and would lose the hurt, mournful look that close association with death in such sad circumstances had left in her merry eyes. Moreover, the care of the baby need not fall wholly upon her. There were plenty of people about to help.

"The fact is, Mrs. Lorraine, Anna knows of people that will take the child," Miss Penny owned. "That's the queer part of it—she wanted a baby for these very people. Of course, she wouldn't have had—but after this afternoon—it's Saturday, you know—I can probably tell you all about it. And—O Mrs. Lorraine, I

hope you won't feel that you must leave me right away. I have enjoyed having you here so much. And it is such a relief to have an older person to talk to now all this has happened. Dear me! it's almost like having Reuben back—and I have only known you a week."

Mrs. Lorraine smiled. "We will stay as long as you are alone, Miss Penny," she assured her. "There is nothing to call us back after all to that bare little cottage.

"Then—O Mrs. Lorraine, why not spend the winter with me?" Miss Penny cried eagerly. "It would make me so happy. You could have a separate sitting-room, if you liked and—O, you would be here Christmas to see Reuben! And Anna ought to be at home while Rusty's away, anyhow. It is so hard on her mother lending her to me. I feel troubled about it all the time—and yet, I cannot get on alone. And of course I would pay Alice just as I do Anna so that it needn't make any difference and you can do your embroidery as well here as—O Mrs. Lorraine, we could get back my other cow and make butter! We both love to do it and I am sure you could make more money in that way and—O don't say no! Dear me! I wish Mr. Langley would come in!"

"I won't say no, and I will think it over. And we will stay on anyhow until Anna gets rested, and so we may as well get the cow back in the shed and begin making butter," returned Mrs. Lorraine quietly though not without secret excitement.

At dinner, Alice could not eat and her mother was distressed. Afterwards she persuaded Miss Penny to lie down and then told Alice to go to her room to rest. Not long afterwards the girl appeared in the living room in her prettiest suit with a jaunty little hat over her dark plaits. Mrs. Lorraine looked up in some surprise.

"You are going out, Alice?"

"Yes, mother, I want—I am going for a walk. I think—I will walk down to the cottage and bring back—some things."

"But I can't go with you and I don't like your going into that empty house alone."

"O it's perfectly safe. They say it's safe everywhere about Farleigh," murmured Alice uneasily.

"Alice, you must not do it," declared Mrs. Lorraine with new decision—for it was wise and kind and *motherly*.

"Very well, I won't go in," said Alice in an odd voice.

"Her mother looked at her. "You are restless, dear. You are more upset, now, over Anna's escapade even than Miss Penny at her age. You feel as if you wanted to get away from everything for a little and I don't blame you. But—we can't do that any more, dear, you and I. That is what we have always done, though it isn't your fault. And anyhow we have to make up now. Let me tell you what to do. Miss Penny says Anna feels obliged to go over to the parsonage this afternoon. Suppose you go over to the

Millers' and stay until she comes back? You can help take care of the baby. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"I'll go right over," said Alice, and would have started but her mother arrested her.

"Hadn't you better change your suit, Alice? Tomorrow is Sunday, and if you get it creased there'd be no chance to press it to-night."

Already Alice had expended considerable nervous energy on the subject of her dress. At one moment, she had felt as if she should don her poorest gown out of consideration for the shabbiness of the stranger. Again, that had seemed a shabby thing to do and she had decided to wear her most attractive things to accord, not with the stranger's garb but with his manner and bearing. Then she would think of the dusty shop and waver. She might never have any more new clothes and perhaps it was foolish to risk spoiling a really handsome suit for the sake of making a good appearance before a stranger whom she didn't know whether she liked and whom she would probably never see after to-day.

Then she said that she knew that she liked him. And besides, she had to have excitement after having had that beautiful, romantic image of Dick Cartwright so cruelly shattered before her eyes. She didn't know how she should bear that if it wasn't for looking forward to seeing John Converse. And she *would* see him again after to-day. She would have to—for she meant to help him in his quest. And to-day she was to be as nice as she knew how to be and as interested

in helping him plan, and she would also look as well as it was in her power to look, so that altogether it would seem pleasant to him or not boresome to see her again.

She said now to her mother that she would be careful not to muss her skirt, and Mrs. Lorraine did not protest further. But she breathed a sigh of relief as she saw her at the Miller's gate. She felt that Alice would be all right after an hour with the baby. For though he wasn't a very attractive baby, he appealed to Mrs. Lorraine. He was quiet, he didn't cry nor fuss, and he was a baby-creature.

But he wasn't to have a chance that day. For not long after, the two girls left the house together. Alice had explained that her mother sent her over to help but that she had planned to go to the cottage to get the keys she had left there the day before. Anna declared that the baby was asleep and that there was nothing to do, and begged her to come along and tell her on the way of what had happened during her absence.

"I can't get a sane, sensible word out of anyone. Braids of yellow hair and orphan babies are the only subjects people will mention to-day," she added drolly and yet a bit plaintively. "And I'm fed up with the matter of yellow hair, and if I am going to talk about babies, it's with people that appreciate their fine points better than anyone I have seen thus far."

As they parted at the lane, Alice begged Anna not to say anything about her having come to the cottage.

Anna assented without question and went on to the parsonage.

Alice Lorraine stole softly up the lane. There was no one in sight and no sound. She was earlier than the hour she had named and she went round the house and sat down on the step of the kitchen porch. After a little she stole part way down the overgrown path to the shop and back again. The shop looked as empty as the house,—nay, emptier. The girl was convinced that there was no one there. And her heart grew cold at the thought that four o'clock might come and yet bring no one.

Suppose he shouldn't come? John Converse had the key not only to the shop but to the house. Suppose he had been—well, the sort of person her mother, for example, might guess him to be upon hearing the story? He wasn't, but—something might have happened. He might be ill at the hotel at Marsden Bridge or—any number of things might have happened to prevent his coming. And he had the keys! Suppose her mother should want to get into the cottage to-morrow?

The girl rose and ran swiftly but quietly to the shop. Her heart was in her mouth as she knocked softly on the door, so softly that the sound wouldn't have been heard from the porch she had just left. The door opened and the stranger held it wide for her.

Another stranger to-day! And it wasn't only the clear light that made the difference. John Converse might have been another person from the man of

yesterday. He was dressed well,—almost elegantly. Certainly his suit, though it had a sack coat, was of fine material and good make and he wore a silk shirt and jaunty tie as if he were used to such informal elegance; and all the accessories were in keeping down to his neat shoes. He was not less thin nor pale—his face was almost cadaverous in the stronger light. But his eyes were merry and full of life, his rather large, thin-lipped mouth puckered with amusement at her wonderment, and there was a boyish eagerness about him that was flattering and very grateful to the girl's perturbed spirit.

They shook hands gravely.

"It is more than good of you to come," he said.

Alice Lorraine gave a little cry.

"Why, what have you done!" she exclaimed and looked about her as if frightened.

"Won't you sit down and take in the magnificance at your ease?" he asked with a whimsical charm which seemed native to him. And Alice dropped into the large and comfortable wooden chair he indicated which was not only free from dust but had apparently been scrubbed clean.

Likewise the whole place. The room had been cleared of rubbish and transformed by the magic of strong, eager hands and soap and water to a quaintly attractive sitting-room. The bareness added to its apparent size. Odd bits of hand-made furniture were disposed gracefully about and every natural comeliness made the most of. Even the stairway added some-

thing to the general attractiveness. A bit of old rug lay before it and another at the door. The windows had a strip of dark cloth above for a blind and a white curtain over the lower sash. A small sheet-iron stove, still rusty, but clean, warmed the place and held a tiny kettle in which the water was boiling. A stand in the corner was covered by a white tea cloth, apparently just out of the shop, and held a tea pot and two cups, which were also new and gaudily pretty, and a plate of sweet biscuit.

"O Mr. Converse, you are a wizard surely!" cried the girl. "I really believe that you could turn yourself into whatever you wished. You could be an old gypsy woman or a fat man with bright-red hair and could walk the streets of Farleigh by day."

He laughed. "It was soap and water and elbow grease that did this. I am afraid they wouldn't presto-change me so easily."

Then suddenly he paled. "Nevertheless, I have seen the time when soap and water might have worked wonders with me," he declared bitterly. Alice looked at him in consternation.

"Pardon me. It was awfully good of you to come," he said in another tone. "I hoped you would, and I believed you would unless you were prevented. And really——"

"You will stay right here now that you have made it so comfortable, won't you?" Alice asked eagerly.

"O, I didn't do it for that. I wanted to have a decent place for you to come to," he said, boyishly

ingenuous. Despite his gaunt face, which was also lined, and his grey hair, he was really youthful as he spoke.

"What a lot of work for a person you never saw but once," she said. "I felt last night—when we saw Mr. Langley, you know—that we hadn't settled anything—I mean, I thought I might help you—tell you about people or find out about those I don't know—but——"

She paused. "I'm talking for all the world like Miss Penny," she owned. "What I mean to say is that I am glad I did manage to arrange to see you to-day and that I was able to get away. And I am glad you have done this because it will make it comfortable for you. You can stay here as long as you choose—make it your headquarters." And she went on to say that she and her mother were to remain at the Hollow for some time.

"You will stay, won't you?" she begged.

"It would be perfectly bully if I could," he cried eagerly. "I could—well, reconnoiter from here in grand style."

But as he referred to his purpose in this region, the boyish look fled and he looked sad and perhaps old. And Alice remembered Enoch Arden and her heart ached for him.

But he was a boy again as he made the tea, served her, and sat down with his own cup. Alice, too, was a younger girl than she would have been if she had never known Anna Miller. They dallied happily over

the ceremony and afterwards went to the top of the stair so that Alice might see the change in the upper chamber, which was as wonderful as that below. The upper room, indeed, with its tent roof, beams, rafters and brick chimney, its window at either end and its built-in benches was more attractive than the lower. Alice rather hoped John Converse would suggest their sitting there, but he did not, and they returned to their chairs in the lower apartment to begin finally upon the real business of the afternoon.

"I don't really know how to start out," Alice remarked. "The people I know best are Miss Penny and the Miller family."

"In my day there were no Millers in Farleigh—except the moth millers,—dusty-millers, we used to call them. I remember Miss Penny, however,—a little old maid who always came to church. She drove a fat pony. I suppose that is dead long ago?"

"I'm learning to drive him. I feed him sugar every day," said Alice. "But I am wasting time. Suppose you ask me questions."

"Well, suppose you tell me a bit more about that Cartwright fellow you mentioned yesterday."

Alice paled. She didn't want to think of Dick Cartwright now.

"I was all wrong," she said in a low, pained voice. "He wasn't good. He was—O, a dreadful man."

"Why Miss Lorraine! what do you mean?" he asked. And she thought he had noticed her secret pain.

"I can't tell you what he did. Mr. Langley told me

in confidence and I really ought not to say anything," she returned sadly. "Mr. Langley's the only one who—well, he's very anxious that this Richard Cartwright should be forgotten."

"But I thought—didn't you tell me yesterday that Mr. Langley was this man's friend?"

"O yes. But this is on account of the son, Reuben. He's a fine boy, everyone says, and he's in college. Mr. Langley doesn't want him to know how bad his father was. And he doesn't want people to be thinking and talking of him for fear—well, he says it is best that he be forgotten."

"I told you I knew Mr. Langley once. I should have thought of him as being faithful to the end of things," he said bitterly.

"He was faithful to the end of things," the girl rejoined warmly. "He——"

"Nonsense. There's no such thing to-day as faithfulness," he declared bitterly.

Afterwards, as she lay in her bed at night—Alice remembered Enoch Arden and wondered if he had learned of his wife's unfaith and that had made him so bitter. At this moment, however, the girl was too wrought up to think of aught but the matter under discussion.

"There is, too. There is—ever so much!" she cried hotly.

"Not at all. One faces this way—a tiny breath of wind, and round goes the weather-cock!"

"I should think——" the girl began indignantly. She

didn't pause because she didn't exactly know what it was she should think but because he was looking at her with a strange, half-hurt, half-angry look in his eyes.

"Even you, Miss Lorraine,—pardon me, but aren't you really an example? Wasn't it only yesterday that you were saying that it wasn't fair that this man who had loved music and planned higher things than his weakness could fulfill should be utterly forgotten because he ran amuck when his head was turned by grief? And to-day—apparently you can't think badly enough of him!"

The girl's heart throbbed wildly. A flaming colour came to her cheeks giving her real beauty.

"Well, you yourself!" she cried hotly. "You—you said nasty things yesterday about Dick Cartwright and now, to-day, one would think he was your best——"

Suddenly she stopped. She was aware of a disturbance from without. Someone was calling her name and banging on the door of the cottage. Now she realised that it had been going on some time and she had been vaguely aware of it. She sprang to her feet, her face horror-stricken. Her mother had come for her!

CHAPTER XI

ANNA reached home worn and fatigued on that Saturday afternoon only to learn that Alice Lorraine was still absent. Without the knowledge of anyone, she slipped out and returned to the lane. It was she whom Alice heard pounding on the kitchen door.

Recognizing Anna, Alice clasped her in a hysterical embrace.

"I thought it was—mother!" she sobbed.

"Good heavens! is her mother such an ogre as all that!" Anna said to herself. Aloud she said lightly: "What, with my bobbed hair? I like that. No, Alice my child, your mother is waiting for you to join her at supper, and we must hike. Don't cry any more and they won't know. They'll think it's from running—for we'd better run."

Something in her brave, tired voice went to Alice's heart. She kissed her warmly.

"I'll run, Anna dear, but you take your time," she bade her. But Anna stood firm. And though they did not run, they walked fast and were not long in reaching the Hollow. Just before they came to Miss Penny's, Alice spoke with effort.

"Anna, I want awfully to get down to the cottage to-morrow. Do you suppose I can?"

"It won't be so easy, being Sunday. Could you possibly wait until Monday?" Anna asked in troubled tone.

"O Anna, not possibly!" cried the other girl vehemently, remembering her parting with John Converse. For they had been interrupted in the midst of what was virtually a quarrel. Alice felt as if she could not possibly let a day go by without seeing him and straightening it out. Besides, if he didn't see her tomorrow he might feel that she was offended, or that it had been her mother and she had forbidden her to come near again.

"All right. We'll fix it somehow," Anna assured her, and asked Alice if she wished her to go in with her.

"O Anna, if you would!" cried Alice, throwing her arm about her and embracing her warmly.

Thereafter for many days Anna Miller had an additional burden upon her shoulders—the burden of Alice Lorraine's mystery. The change in Alice which was inexplicable to Anna but which seemed painfully obvious, she tried to keep from the knowledge of others as she endeavored to cover up her secret visits to the cottage she and her mother had occupied. She did this cheerfully and willingly, but her heart was heavy. For Alice did not seem happy at all. She seemed nervous and apprehensive, so that Anna feared the secret she was helping her to conceal was anything but a pleasant one.

But for this, Anna would have been serene. For

Mrs. Langley's unexpected behaviour in respect to the baby troubled her less and less as the days passed. She still expected to hand the child over to the household at the parsonage on some fine day, but she was ready to wait. Indeed, but for the fact that the care of little Joe during school hours fell upon her mother, she would have been glad to wait indefinitely.

And as it was, the girl had never been so happy with anyone or anything as she was with this forlorn baby orphan. No one shared her enthusiasm in any considerable measure. Alice Lorraine went into ecstasies over little Joe by fits and starts and then forgot all about him. Mrs. Lorraine was becoming attached to him, and Anna's father and the boys took kindly to him. But Mrs. Miller disapproved thoroughly of the whole affair,—the only instance of her disapproval Anna had known since her return home. And she remained unresigned to her part of minding little Joe when Anna was at school, though he slept a good part of the time and for the rest was, she had to own, as little trouble as a child could be. She even confessed, when pressed, that he was hardly more bother than a kitten.

This was not exaggeration. Joe, Junior, occasioned little trouble. On the other hand, he paid as little in the coin of babyhood for such trouble as he gave as could any human being at his interesting age. Not only was he not irresistible but he was quite negligible, unless, indeed, he aroused vague irritation in the mind of the beholder because of his utter want of attractive-

ness. He was thin and scrawny and sallow; his head was too big for his emaciated little body, and his pale-coloured eyes too big for his mite of an old man's face. His feet and hands were ugly claws, his legs mere sticks—one would as quickly have looked for dimples in the living skeleton of the circus. He had a mere wisp of tow-coloured hair and never showed the teeth he possessed. He never smiled, never, indeed, looked other than woe-begone. Though he never cried out and seldom whined or whimpered, he always seemed to want sadly something that was never by any chance what was proffered him.

But he clung to Anna, and though he was never other than mournful even with her, he was passively content. And Anna adored him. It was no task for her to hurry home from school to relieve her mother—she could scarcely wait to get at the baby after any absence. He slept in an old cradle (salvaged from Miss Penny's garret) by the side of her bed, and the girl was ready to get up at any hour of the night for milk or water, and sang to him by the hour in her sweet young voice. She spent nearly all the money she had saved in a year in the purchase of a wardrobe for the baby, who was the best-dressed child of his age, or perhaps of any age, in the two villages. She took pride and pleasure in ironing the frills and laces of his little frocks and petticoats and in keeping him immaculately tidy,—the latter being easy, as the baby never played, and if he was placed on the floor never moved from the spot. She brushed the scanty hair on top of

his head, longing for the time when there should be enough to make a curl.

But one day as she did this, it came to the girl that when that time should come, in all likelihood Joe, Junior, wouldn't be with her. Her heart sank. And it was borne in upon her that if she was to give the baby away, it must happen very soon. A little later, and it would be utterly impossible. Even now, she wouldn't have been able even to contemplate the idea if it had been anyone but Mr. Langley who was to benefit thereby.

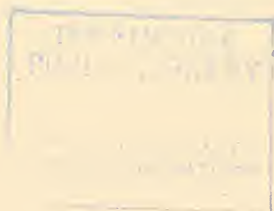
Mr. Langley had been in to see little Joe and had taken to him more warmly than anyone else had done, unless one counted Alice in one mood. He had held the baby all the while he stayed and hadn't seemed to know how to get away. He hadn't seemed to feel any want in him; he had admired him apparently as much as Anna herself. He needed him more than she did, of course, but O, he didn't *want* him more!

He didn't know that he wanted him, for he did not dream that there was any chance of having him. Mrs. Langley kept it dark—trust her!—and Anna didn't feel like saying anything until she was ready to receive the child. Miss Penny was the only other person who knew, and she, though she couldn't keep a secret of her own, was quite safe with that of another. But he should know as soon as it was prudent, and that, Anna decided, must be very soon. She said to herself it was up to her to make what Caesar calls a forced march.



Anna took pride and pleasure in ironing the frills and laces of his little frocks.

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Already she had talked to Mrs. Langley of the baby for half an hour at a time, and had repeated her request to be allowed to bring him to the parsonage. Mrs. Langley always declared that it would break her heart to see him but Anna felt that one glimpse of him would settle the whole matter. Wherefore on the next Saturday she announced that she meant to bring Joe, Junior, with her that day-week.

For an instant the invalid's eyes brightened. Then she sighed deeply.

"O no, Anna, I couldn't bear the sight of a baby. It would break my heart," she declared. And her emotion was unfeigned.

"But it isn't the same, Mrs. Langley, Joe, Junior, being a boy," Anna protested. "If he made you think of anyone it wouldn't be Ella May, it would be of that little lamb."

"O, is his hair curly?" asked the invalid eagerly.

"Well, no, not yet," Anna admitted regretfully. "But he has such a sober, meek little face, young, and yet sort of sedate and oldish, too, you know, that he makes me think of the little lamb."

"Dear me, you are like a pretty lamb yourself, Anna, with your fuzzy yellow hair. I believe I really like you better with it cut so," declared Mrs. Langley with sudden enthusiasm.

"You'd better take a good look at it then, for it will be longer before you see it again," Anna suggested mischievously. "I shan't be hiking down to the parsonage

for some time, you see. I can't come any more unless you let me bring Joe, Junior."

Mrs. Langley clasped her thin hands. "O Anna, don't speak so even in fun," she begged. "Of course you will come next Saturday—or sooner if you have a chance. Only please don't mention that baby to me again. It stirs me all up."

"I won't," the girl assented meekly, adding: "for I sha'n't be here to mention him or anything else. Honest and true, I can't come any more without him. Whenever I am not in school, my place is with that blessed little monkey, Mrs. Langley. It's mighty good of ma to mind him as much as she does since she doesn't take to him, but I don't mean to put it over with her unless I have to. And now it's cold weather, the boys want to skate Saturday afternoons—and before long there'll be sliding."

"There's that Alice Lorraine. How about her?" demanded Mrs. Langley.

Anna opened her eyes very wide. Extremely vague in general, unaware apparently of the existence of anyone outside her own four walls, sometimes, when her own interests were concerned, the woman was uncannily acute.

"O Mrs. Langley, I wouldn't go off and leave that precious child with Alice Lorraine. She's dear, but she's absent-minded and I should be on pins and needles all the while for fear he was being drowned or scalded or kidnapped," she declared.

"There's that neighbor of Miss Penny's, Mrs. Phelps," Mrs. Langley persisted.

"For the love of Mike!" cried the girl in utter amazement. "Why, I should as soon think of asking the Lord Mayor of London to run over every Saturday afternoon."

"Well, there must be someone who lives near," Mrs. Langley murmured with unusual meekness.

"There isn't, and anyhow, I wouldn't trust Junior with 'em!" cried Anna. And suddenly she lost her temper,—something that was extremely rare with the other Miller girl. "I simply can't come again without the baby and what's more I won't, so there! That's all there is to it. Cash down or no goods delivered!"

And she flung herself from the place like a small whirlwind.

She had passed the lane, when she recollected Alice Lorraine and paused. She had agreed to meet her at the lane as near five as possible, and strolling back she seated herself on the stone wall to consider. On other occasions she had either just made the hour or had been late, and she felt a certain hesitation about hanging around the place for a matter of twenty minutes. She said to herself sadly that it was just as if she suspected Alice of meeting someone there, though she knew—she hoped with all her heart she knew—that Alice wouldn't do such a thing. But O, what was her secret? What was she doing, haunting the lane and the cottage almost daily?

As she was pondering sadly, she heard a step,

and looked up to see Mr. Langley. Her heart sank. She supposed he would reproach her for leaving Mrs. Langley so rudely. But apparently he knew nothing about it.

"O Anna, I wanted to speak to you and tried to get home before you should leave," he said. "Do you mind coming back to my study for a few minutes?"

"What now?" the girl said to herself. But he was all kindness as he led her back through the gate, helped her off with her jacket and established her in the most comfortable chair in his study.

"I want to speak to you in regard to Miss Lorraine. You know her well, I think, Anna?" he began at once.

"Why yes, Mr. Langley," she faltered.

"And you like her? You—believe in her?"

"Of course."

"I am glad to hear that. I like the girl so far as I know her and I believe in her. But things look a bit odd and I want to talk a little with you. People in the village are talking about Miss Lorraine. Someone said to me that at least two persons have seen her walking at dusk with a strange man."

"O Mr. Langley, I don't believe that. There must be some mistake!" cried Anna.

"I hope so and think so. And yet, do you know, I thought myself I saw her walking one night with a stranger. The other person disappeared and she was alone when I met her. But I couldn't shake off the impression.

Anna stared at him helplessly.

"There's still more," he went on reluctantly. "There is, I fear, no doubt but that there is a strange man hanging about the village—the Farleigh end. More than two or three persons have declared they saw a man peering in their windows. They connect this man with Miss Lorraine. They say it is the same man she walks with, and—dear me, her father being in prison, it is so easy for people to lose their common sense and originate all sorts of rumors."

"But Mr. Langley, surely you don't believe that—about a man looking into people's windows?" Anna demanded.

"I don't know what to think. The truth is, that before I heard any rumors—it was last Sunday evening—I felt that there was someone looking in at me through yonder window. I have always left the blind up—until this week."

"I feel stunned, Mr. Langley," said Anna mournfully.

"Poor child! No wonder! I hated to bother you with this, but dear me—I seem to be following the lead of others and bringing my burdens to lay upon your youthful shoulders. However—we cannot let this go on. I am convinced that there is a mistake and that Miss Lorraine can explain. Shall I speak to her or would you rather, Anna?"

Anna considered. "Perhaps I'd better," she said. "But—I guess I won't do anything until after to-morrow. I'd better think it over first."

Mr. Langley begged to drive her home, but recol-

recting her promise to Alice she made an excuse. And there was Alice waiting for her at the lane.

To-night Alice was in high spirits. First she asked about the baby in a pathetically perfunctory way, then she put a careless query in regard to Reuben. Anna's heart grew cold. What did it mean? Why was she asking so many questions of late, particularly about Reuben?

Reaching Miss Penny's she went in with Alice, understanding clearly now that Alice wished her mother to think they had been together all afternoon. Mrs. Lorraine looked up with troubled face.

"O Alice, I didn't know you were going out this afternoon," she said. "We looked everywhere for you. I wanted you to go over to Wenham to the bank to see Mr. Clarke. If we are to stay here until after Christmas, I feel as if we ought to give up the cottage."

Alice became very white. "We can't give it up so suddenly," she said with a curious gasp. "You have to—give notice."

"It's different in our case," said Mrs. Lorraine, paling herself. "But never mind now. I will write a note and send it to-night. Miss Penny says Mr. Phelps will take it."

"Not to-night, mother," the girl said quickly and with a certain fierceness of determination. "Wait till—next Saturday perhaps. I have—lost the key. I'll go over to-morrow and see if I can find it."

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Anna Miller had a concrete problem to solve, it was her habit—rather more unconscious, however, than deliberate—to put herself in touch with the situation or the matter itself and trust to her mother-wit for suggestions as to procedure. Wherefore, as soon as Joe, Junior, fell asleep the following afternoon, she betook herself over to Miss Penny's to see Alice. She had no plan. She only wished to spend an hour in Alice's company, after which she might have something to meditate upon.

She found Mrs. Lorraine just finishing the washing-up and was surprised that Alice would have left it to her. Then she recollected the hour and wondered why the work should have been delayed. As she enquired for Alice with apparent unconcern, she saw that Mrs. Lorraine's face was flushed and that Miss Penny showed traces of excitement, and guessed that something had happened directly after dinner. It wasn't unlikely that there had been a discussion between Alice and her mother and that Alice had flown.

"Alice is up in her chamber lying down, Anna dear," Miss Penny informed her. "She may be asleep, but you are so quiet you may steal up to see if you like."

Anna gazed enquiringly at Mrs. Lorraine, who begged her to sit down.

"Have you noticed anything strange about Alice lately, Anna?" she asked in a troubled voice.

"Why Mrs. Lorraine, now you speak of it—Alice does seem—nervous," the girl admitted.

"She does. Decidedly. I cannot understand it. She gets wrought up over such trifles. You saw how it was last night about giving up the cottage? And to-day she wanted to rush off the minute dinner was over to look for the key she lost. She seemed all used up over it. I told her Mr. Clarke very likely had others, and that anyhow it wasn't such a serious matter as she made it to lose a key in a quiet community like this, but she was too excited to be reasonable. Finally, I persuaded her to go up and lie down and put this off until to-morrow, but I feel worn out myself from the struggle."

"You don't think the work she does here is tiring her?" asked Miss Penny anxiously.

"She did more at the cottage, and besides of late she hardly does anything," said Mrs. Lorraine.

"Alice is high-strung and goes into things too intensely," remarked Miss Penny. "She took to going off for long walks when you were away, Anna, and I think she overdid. I don't think she went so far as going to the cemetery as you did; but she seems to have become interested in old-time things and people—antiquities and relics—not relicts,—and yet, I don't know—there's Enoch Arden, you know."

"Enoch Arden!" cried Anna aghast.

Miss Penny smiled. "My dear, my head is all right,

—as good, that is to say, as it ever was. I was simply—but naturally you didn't see the point. One night some time ago—it was, O, a month ago, I should say, though it might not have been, Alice read Enoch Arden aloud to her mother and me. We all talked about it afterwards but Alice couldn't seem to get through. She kept questioning me. She wanted to find out whether it could be true—here, for instance, right here in this village. She started me to thinking of the different widows, you know, and whether any husbands had left Farleigh and never come back. Reuben's father wasn't exactly a husband, you know, though he went away and never returned. But he was a widower. And his wife even if she had been alive would never have married again. And if she had, it wouldn't have been Enoch Arden, for he was killed in a wreck—that's more certain than being lost at sea."

"But—Enoch Arden?" asked Anna still perplexed.

"That's just it. That's why it took so long to get through—if we ever got through? Alice would get me started and then I would be reminded of something else and lose the point. There are so many different stories connected with everyone, you see. And yet, I don't know that anyone in Farleigh ever had so many stories that could be told at his age as Reuben has.

Anna put the kitten tenderly down on the hearth.

"You're not going upstairs, Anna?" asked Mrs. Lorraine.

"I think I'll run straight home and see my baby,"

returned Anna, who knew well that Alice Lorraine was not in her room or in the Hollow at all. And she acted upon her words.

She sighed as she climbed the stair at home to her own chamber. The problem of Alice seemed too big for the like of her. But she sighed yet more deeply when Freddy came up to say that Mr. Langley was down in the sitting-room. Had something happened? she asked herself in terror; or was it only that he had come to ask her if she had spoken to Alice? But no, he had given her until to-morrow. Looking over the baby to see that he was immaculate, she picked him up and went down, not even stopping to glance at the mirror, though she had been lying on her bed.

"Anna looks almost as much a child as the baby himself," Mr. Langley remarked to Mrs. Miller, rising as the girl entered with little Joe on her arm, his starched frock standing out over his frilled petticoats, his mournful, colourless face against her rosy one, the wisp of hair on top of his head contrasting oddly with her thick yellow mop of short locks.

"She's just wearing herself out with that child, Anna is," remarked her mother rather fretfully.

"Let me have him, pray Anna," said the minister eagerly holding out his arms. The baby went to him indifferently.

He was equally indifferent to the remainder of the company that filled the room. Miss Penny and Mrs. Lorraine had come over to be in time for him when he waked. All the Millers were there. The boys

always hung round when they felt sure the baby wouldn't be left alone for them to mind, and Seth Miller never liked to leave the house when the child was awake. But one or many,—it was all a matter of indifference to little Joe.

Anna was secretly relieved by the presence of Miss Penny and Mrs. Lorraine. For the minute she saw Mr. Langley she knew his coming had nothing to do with Alice. She recollected her visit at the parsonage the day before and knew as well as if he had announced it that he had come to bid her reconsider her decision. But he wouldn't be likely to ask her before the others and if he did, it would be easier for her to refuse. But she sighed within her. She wasn't sure. And fancy refusing Mr. Langley anything before Miss Penny! And she couldn't explain afterwards even to Miss Penny that it was all for his ultimate good. That would be quite too smug!

But he acted as if he had come merely for a social call. The baby rested in his arms, quiet and sober, while they talked of indifferent things though not indifferently. Mr. Langley and Mrs. Miller discussed the concert at the church last month and Seth Miller declared that his wife was full of music, and announced, to the surprise of all, that he planned to get a piano-forte before very long for her and the girls—Rusty would enjoy playing on it when she was home for her holidays.

"O pa, can we play on it?" cried both the boys at once.

Seth Miller frowned. But before he could speak, Anna smiled on him.

"I guess they can, if I am in the room with them until they get used to it and know how to handle it, can't they, pa?" she asked. And he assured her that of course they could.

Meantime one and another tried to relieve Mr. Langley of his burden, though none was as disinterested as he seemed. The baby was sober—sad, indeed, but he was very comfortable to hold. He never wriggled as many babies do. And plain as he was, there was something appealing about him. And besides, there was always the prospect of being the fortunate one to win his first smile. But Mr. Langley refused all proffers. He wouldn't even give him up to Miss Penny.

"You may have him when I go, Miss Penny," he said smiling, "bu I want him as long as I stay. You're all near neighbours and can see little Joe every day, but I seldom get a chance. But bless me, what's the boy up to now?"

Nothing very exciting, truly. A weak little hand was fumbling for Mr. Langley's watch guard, the baby gazing at the bright trinkets with some interest. Of course the minister did the usual thing, drew out his watch and held it to the child's ear. Joe listened attentively and apparently wished it to be held there indefinitely.

Mr. Langley had to return it to his pocket, however, when he rose to take leave, and it was probably that

which troubled the baby. But he thought, as he would have put the child in Miss Penny's arms, that little Joe cried for him, and a certain satisfaction was apparent beneath his concern.

The baby did not cry out. He did not make a sound. But two tears spilled upon his thin cheeks and the maternal Anna seized him anxiously. Burying his face in her shoulder, Joe, Junior, found instant solace.

"I want to speak to you a moment, please, Anna," Mr. Langley asked. Anna's heart sank but she went out into the passage with him. It was cold there, so he wouldn't keep her, and she hoped she could hold out.

"Mrs. Langley is feeling badly because you said you couldn't come to see her next Saturday," he said very kindly. "If you are willing to spend the time, I wonder if we can't rearrange matters. Why can't I come over and mind the baby while you're gone? He's good with me, as you see, and with the watch——"

He was like a boy in his eagerness. Anna paled.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Langley, only really that wouldn't help out. You see ma would feel just the same. She'd love to have you come, of course, but she wouldn't feel as if it was polite to leave you and—you see if she was right here all the while, there wouldn't be any need of your coming way over from the parsonage. Now would there?"

He smiled. "You remind me of what is called in

logic a vicious circle," he said. But he became serious at once.

"I hate to seem to overpersuade you, but, Anna, if there's any way in the world you can manage it, I should be more than grateful to you," he said earnestly. "Already, I know, I am under tremendous obligation to you. You have done more for Mrs. Langley—and for me—than I can ever begin to thank you for. And yet I am asking further grace. But perhaps if you could manage to keep up for a few weeks more, we can get along afterwards."

The girl's eyes filled with tears. With all the hardship she had known, she had never learned to be ungracious. She couldn't explain that she was holding out because only so, it seemed to her, could she bring about the desired end, and that she was acting for his ultimate good. She couldn't tell him that she, a school girl, was treating a grown woman, and the minister's wife into the bargain, like a naughty, stubborn child.

"Really and truly, Mr. Langley, I have thought and planned and tried to do the best I can. But I can't come to the parsonage any more unless I can bring the baby with me," she said in a low, desperate voice.

"Well, you know best, Anna," he said in a tone whose kindness could not cloak his intense disappointment. "I am very sorry, and if anything happens that would enable you to change your mind, I am sure you will let me know."

Anna Miller flew to her room and wept. She who

had endured with all sweetness much that would have made another bitter, now wept almost bitterly, while little Joe sat beside her on the bed in solemn silence. But presently the girl felt a little hand on her head, uncovered her face and smiled through her tears at the baby's first attempt at a caress. And he of his own accord cuddled down beside her on the pillow with his cheek against hers.

"You darling love!" the girl cried. "But, O, it's *my* heart you'll be breaking instead of Mrs. Langley's. Here I am with my frame-up to get rid of you, hurting Mr. Langley and disciplining his wife, when if I should make a get-away of it, it would simply kill me dead! And after all, why should I? I have a mind, honey-sweet, to throw over the whole thing, that ginger-coloured old woman with the peppery eyes and all, and let Mr. Langley become a hoary old man as soon as he has a mind to, and just devote myself to you. When are you going to talk, precious? Can't you say An-na?"

Joe, Junior, remained dumb.

"Well, I am mighty thankful you can't—or won't. For if you could—or would—then I would never in the world let you go. And really, I *must* put it through. You'd be far better off at the parsonage with the best man in all the world for a daddy, and with a mother that wouldn't be half bad if she would once give in to your blessed charms—as she is going to do. Besides, you'd belong there, and you don't here. Ma doesn't want you round, and you feel it in

your sensitive little heart and that's why you act so queer and offish. But it'll all come out right—for everybody but poor me. Cheer up, old sport!"

CHAPTER XIII

AS Mr. Langley walked slowly back to Farleigh in the early dusk of the cloudy November day, he reflected upon his visit, upon the beautiful baby, upon what had carried him thither and upon Anna's unaccountable unwillingness to gratify his wife's not unnatural desire. But he said to himself it wasn't really unaccountable—it only seemed so to him. How serious the girl had looked as she stood with the baby in her arms, its little face hidden on her shoulder—and how staunch and true! And when all was said, she had simply refused to neglect her duty as she saw it. Quite likely, too, she saw more clearly than he. Certainly there was nothing selfish in her standpoint, while he, for his part, could not so absolve himself. He hoped he had not urged her unduly.

Nevertheless, the situation was not normal. Anna's mother was rightly troubled. The girl was too young to shoulder the responsibility she had taken upon herself. After the strain of those hard years in the city, she ought to be free to devote herself to school and a school-girl's pleasures with only the normal home duties of such an one. Someone ought to adopt the baby—someone in Farleigh so that Anna need not be separated wholly from him. Someone—Mr. Langley

stopped and put forth considerable effort to dislodge a stone between the flags with his walking stick. As he went on again, he said to himself that it would be a simple matter to put through. If they knew there was a chance, it seemed to him that people would simply flock to the Millers' in crowds to beg for that most engaging baby. How wise the little fellow had looked as he listened to the watch!

Sighing vague, he hastened on as if he wished to escape something. But with all his speed, he was unable to do so, and depression settled upon him. He supposed that it was because he was drawing near the parsonage and would have to disappoint his wife.

He went directly to her room, realising, even in his preoccupation, that he owed the privilege to Anna. For only since she had entered the wedge, had he fallen into the habit of seeking his wife at odd moments. And though she rather tolerated than welcomed his visits, he was grateful for even tolerance. For her long illness and silence and desire for seclusion had estranged husband and wife almost as effectually as bitter feeling might have done.

Mrs. Langley sat in her cushioned chair in the dark, gloomy room, awaiting the word he was to bring. Her eyes were weak from headache and want of sunshine and out-of-door air, and in winter she had her tea very early to avoid lighting the heavily shaded lamp. Both Mr. Langley and Bell Adams felt that, having admitted Anna Miller, if Mrs. Langley would also let in the sunshine she might utterly banish neu-

ralgia. But neither ventured to make the suggestion. She had already had her tea, and when he entered the room, her husband felt rather than saw her eager questioning gaze.

"Anna still feels that she cannot get away without the baby, Ella dear," he said gently, seating himself on the edge of a chair, like a poor relation in a fine drawing room. "And really, I see her difficulty. As a matter of fact, the girl has added one member—a complete stranger with no claim whatever—to a rather straitened household and she doesn't wish her mother to feel the burden unduly. And certainly Mrs. Miller had a difficult time when her children were small and——"

His wife broke in almost fiercely.

"Russell Langley! I tell you that I cannot get along without seeing Anna at least every Saturday," she cried.

He sighed as he pushed back a bit further on the chair, though not enough to be comfortable.

"Well, Ella, why not let her bring him along—why not try it just for once?" he asked quietly. "He's really a beautiful child. (The minister was quite sincere.) He sat on my lap all the while I was there, quiet as a mouse, and the first I knew the little fellow was feeling for my watch. I only wish you could have seen his face, dear, as I held it to his ear. Do let Anna bring him on Saturday!"

"I couldn't bear the shock of it," she said dully as

if repeating a formula, then suddenly enquired: "Russell, where's my watch?"

"In the top drawer of my desk. I wind it every night. Would you like it, Ella?"

She assented rather sharply and he fetched it. Now he seated himself comfortably and taking the key from his chain, wound the watch and set it exactly by his own and put it on the stand with the medicine bottles and the photograph of the lamb.

"She's a stubborn girl, that Anna Miller," his wife remarked.

"She means well," he returned absently in conventional phrase, his mind being otherwise engaged as he presently showed.

"I have it!" he exclaimed suddenly, holding his watch from him as if he had discovered the clue to the mystery in it. "Anna can bring the baby with her, but you needn't see him—you needn't realise that he's in the house at all; and you wouldn't, he's such a mouse. And I'll mind him while Anna visits you. He knows me—I think he rather takes to me, you know, and I can carry him all over the house and show him everything. I fancy the little chap might rather like the statuette on the parlour clock and—O, the elves on the silver water pitcher! And there's my crystal paper weight. And perhaps when I'm over in Wenham I will just step into Wetherell's and see what they have in the way of toys. Boys generally——"

But Mrs. Langley made a sudden move.

"Russell Langley!" she cried. "If that baby comes

to this house, he shall come straight to my room. He can have my watch to play with. He can't hurt it, and if he bites the case, I don't care."

Seth Miller was one of the folk who adored Mr. Langley and he was aware of the disappointed look upon his face as he left the house that Sunday afternoon. He had unbounded confidence in his daughter; if she caused the disappointment, it was because she couldn't help it. But he felt as if he should like to do something particularly nice for the minister to make up for it.

As he pondered upon it, it came to him that he might be able to do some bit of carpentry at the church as a surprise to Mr. Langley. But he couldn't think of anything that was necessary, and to discover any possibility in the way of ornamentation he would have to go over to the church. He had gone over early that morning to see to the fire, had attended service, waiting until everyone was out after Sunday school to lock the building, and he would have to go over early to unlock the building and see that all was right for evening service. He might have postponed this matter until that time, but it seemed to make it of more consequence if he made a special journey, so he decided to go at once.

He was tired enough, however, not to wish to go upstairs for his keys. He had an extra key to the little side door leading to the vestry which he kept in the kitchen so that Anna could get it when he was away. She had sung in the choir before the baby's

arrival and had let the others in and out for rehearsals. But when he looked, the key was not in its place.

Mrs. Miller and the boys had gone home with Miss Penny and Anna was in her room, so he fetched his bunch of keys and went on, wondering that Anna, who was exceedingly careful of such things, should have failed to return the key to the nail where it belonged. As he approached the church from the rear he was suddenly startled by a sound which was, however, not startling in itself—a low, sweet strain of music which seemed to come from the church and to be the voice of the well-known organ.

Seth Miller's heart beat violently. The organist came from Wenham and did not play for evening service. Moreover, she played at Wenham in the afternoon—she was in the church there at this very moment. No one else but Mr. Langley had a key and he did not play the big organ. And—how early the sun set. It was almost dark now. Miller did not believe in ghosts, but—it would be dark inside.

The music ceased. As it died away, it came to him that Anna might be in the church. Perhaps the baby had fallen asleep and she had run down for a little change. He didn't know that she could play the pipe organ, but she was full of music like her mother. Moreover, he wasn't sure as the music he had heard had been correct music. He had something of an ear himself, but the strain was low and he had been excited, and for all he knew, it might have been the chromatic scale. Of course it was Anna, and he

hurried round to the door of which she had the key.

But it was fast. He had told Anna not to lock the door behind her at choir rehearsal, but perhaps she felt that this was different. He unlocked it and went in making a racket and calling her name lest she be frightened.

She was not to be found, however. The audience room looked exactly as it had when he had left it early in the afternoon except that now twilight had fallen upon it. He went to the organ loft, but saw no traces of anyone having been there. And he began to wonder if he had been mistaken. Perhaps he hadn't heard anything. But he knew he had. Perhaps it had come from elsewhere? It had sounded like the organ, but it was rather low and soft for that great organ. Still, where could it have come from? Shaking his head, Seth Miller returned home, his errand forgotten.

That evening as he was about to start for the church, he asked Anna what she had done with the key to the vestry door.

"It's there on the nail, Pa," she said, pointing to the place where it should have been—and where it was!

Too confounded for speech, he took it down, handled and put it back. Then he went out without a word.

He decided to say nothing to Anna until next day. But the next day brought wild excitement to the house in the form of an invitation for Anna to bring little Joe to the parsonage on Saturday, and he forgot the lesser in the greater.

The excitement was great, too, at Miss Penny's, and Joe, Junior, acquired a new importance. Anna consulted Mrs. Lorraine and Miss Penny, and even Mrs. Miller showed an interest in the baby's toilette for the occasion. But no one guessed how painfully the girl made her preparations, for she expected to return without the child. She sang as she flew about, and laughed at the boys who were working hard in all their spare time to teach the baby to talk before he should visit the parsonage. Freddy began with *cat* and *rat*, those being the words he first learned to read. Frank, the older and wiser, experimented with bow-wow, moo-moo and other onomatopoeitic syllables, but with equal unsuccess. The baby wouldn't even say *O*.

On Saturday afternoon, Seth Miller himself drove them over to the parsonage, Miss Penny having loaned her pony. Mr. Langley came to the gate and proudly and rather spectacularly bore the baby into the house as if it were a royal infant. He removed his little bonnet and cloak with surprising deftness, admiring the swan's down border of the hood as if it were ermine. Big Bell stood at the end of the passage with a wistful expression on her homely face and Anna tiptoed past Mrs. Langley's door to let her see the baby first.

But the emotion displayed by the giantess gave the girl pause. On the threshold of Mrs. Langley's room she was seized with sudden apprehension. Suppose it should be too much for the invalid! Her reiterated phrase as to its breaking her heart to see the baby ac-

quired a warning significance. On a sudden Anna wished with all her heart that she hadn't insisted. Suppose the shock were too much for Mrs. Langley!

"We're here," she said faintly, ready to back out across the threshold at a word.

"Come up near," Mrs. Langley bade her more hoarsely than usual and not at all reassuringly. She obeyed tremblingly.

Taking the customary chair, she settled the baby comfortably and fixed her eyes upon his wisp of hair. If she hadn't heard her heart beating wildly she wouldn't have believed that she breathed at all.

For a few moments Mrs. Langley peered at the child in silence. He was beautifully dressed, but he wasn't at all what she had expected from Anna's and her husband's accounts. He wasn't even what a baby would naturally have been expected to be apart from pardonable exaggeration. He wasn't round nor rosy nor pretty; he looked like nothing so much as a very ugly rubber doll dressed in fine raiment. Moreover, Ella Langley had so dreaded the ordeal that cold sweat stood upon her forehead in beads.

None the less, as she gazed, her heart warmed. There was, somehow, something appealing in his big, mournful eyes and plaintive little white, pinched face and perhaps even in the very want of baby charms. The woman hadn't seen a child for years upon years and suddenly her heart yearned towards this one overwhelmingly.

"O Anna, let me take him in my arms," she en-

treated in a voice Anna had never heard before. Surprised and delighted, and without for the moment considering the significance of it, the girl rose quickly to put the baby into the outstretched arms.

But for the first time Joe, Junior, who went mournfully wherever he was placed, indifferent to all but Anna, resisted—resisted convulsively. Springing back with a strength he had not seemed to possess, he clung to Anna with a grasp that was painful in its intensity. Then as Mrs. Langley's hand fell gently upon his shoulder, he uttered a piercing cry—such a shriek as had never before echoed within the parsonage walls. His arms tight about Anna's neck, clutching like a frightened wild animal, Joe, Junior, continued to shriek and without pause.

Never before since Anna had known him had the baby uttered a sound above a mere whimper. The girl's blood congealed for terror. As he continued to scream in a manner that seemed to stop her heart and paralyze her muscles, she stood motionless for a few seconds. Recovering herself, she fled wildly from the room.

She never knew when the baby stopped screaming. Snatching his wraps, in some manner she got him into them, and careless of her own, rushed out of the house and through the gate, flying along the village street in the direction of the Hollow and home. And before the minister, who was in the garret, happily occupied in searching for toys or something that might take the place of toys, had located the strange sound or realised what it meant, Anna Miller and Joe, Junior, were out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. LANGLEY, Mrs. Lorraine and Seth Miller had been severally perturbed at about the same period over a matter which might or might not have had a common occasion. But the excitement of the following week centering about little Joe quite drove other affairs from the minds of the first and last mentioned and caused even Mrs. Lorraine's anxiety over her daughter to be relieved because of the constant demand upon her attention and sympathies. She enquired for the lost key early in the week, and Alice quietly gave it into her hands. As she took it, it seemed as if she remembered another, and that the two were on a ring or tag; but she forebore to question. Neither did she bring up the matter of giving up the cottage. After all, they had made no definite decision and might as well keep the house until after Christmas. She wasn't sure, if Alice remained in this strange and difficult condition, that they ought to remain longer with Miss Penny. But she said nothing of this nor of anything to Alice, hoping that the girl would come to her. But Alice, though she was less nervous and was not out so late, kept her own counsel and her habit of solitary rambles.

But one night when they sat at tea, Miss Penny

suddenly turned to Alice and asked if she had found the key. Alice assented, changing the subject so quickly that her mother was vexed.

"That reminds me, Alice, I thought there were two keys when they were given to us," she said.

"I believe there were. The other is down there. You don't want both, mother?"

"O, were they duplicates, Alice?" her mother asked, for she had thought they might have opened different doors.

"One was for a shed or something," returned Alice carelessly, and turning to Miss Penny made a lame remark about the shape of the cream jug which she had admired before.

"I'll tell you—one must have been the key to the shop!" cried Miss Penny. "You see there was a shop with the old house that was torn down—nearly every house had them once. This one is a tidy little place, or was. Reuben's father used to work there a great deal—I don't know whether it was over his music—of course there was no instrument, but when you think of Wagner—or whoever it was that couldn't hear a sound—though I am not sure that his wife—Reuben's mother—didn't have an old melodeon besides the organ they had in the cottage—not the pipe organ. They never got that. But he made things, too. He made tables and chairs and—what-nots, I rather think—though he hadn't a great deal of time for he worked over to Wenham besides playing the church organ.

Such hands as that man had—and Reuben's are just like them."

"Dear me, I shouldn't have said there was a separate building on the place," remarked Mrs. Lorraine, "should you, Alice?"

"No mother, I shouldn't have," said the girl.

"There's such a tangle of brush and I believe the land drops just there, which I suppose helps hide it," Mrs. Lorraine went on. "I'd rather like to see that shop. I believe I'll go down some afternoon and look it over. Perhaps I can go this week. O Miss Penny, how would you feel about going with me?"

"I would—why, Alice!"

Mrs. Lorraine, seeing that her daughter was very pale and looked as if she were about to faint, rose and went to her. "Are you ill, Alice?" she cried anxiously, holding a goblet of water to her lips.

"No, no, mother. It's nothing. Please sit down again. I had a—sort of pain, that's all," the girl declared.

She wouldn't lie down and even made a pretence of eating her supper. Her colour came back and as she seemed all right next day her mother was not troubled. Indeed, as the week passed, she felt less anxious than she had for some time, for Alice seemed more like her old self again. She hardly went out at all except to the Millers' or with Anna. And on Sunday, to her mother's surprise and delight, she remained in all afternoon.

A storm had been imminent all day and snow began

to fall just as the first bell rang for evening service. Ten minutes after the second bell had ceased ringing, Alice stole down the back stairs in tam o' shanter and ulster and would have slipped out but that her mother saw her and stopped her at the door.

"Alice, you're not going out?" she said, though the girl's purpose was evident.

"I am going to Farleigh to drop this letter in the post office, mother."

"But, my dear child, it isn't open on Sunday."

"There's a place on the outside where you can drop letters in," declared the girl.

"What a pity you didn't send it by Mr. Miller! Don't you know, Alice, that he always goes down for evening service?"

"I didn't want to send it by him."

"Indeed, is it a very important letter, Alice?"

"It's a letter to father!" cried the girl.

Mrs. Lorraine paled. "I am glad you wrote your father, dear, and—it's all right if you wish to post it yourself. Wait a minute and I will go with you."

"O mother, you mustn't leave Miss Penny!" Alice declared; then, as steps sounded at that moment on the porch: "O, someone's coming. Let me get away." And she slipped quickly out.

Not long afterwards Set Miller arrived with his lantern which he turned down to a proper height and left in the porch. Miller was earning a good income as janitor of the schools in the South Hollow, including, of course, the academy, and as sexton of the

church, besides having all the carpentry he could do during the school vacation. He had moved his family into a warm, comfortable house and was the head or at least the source of supply of a comfortable, well-dressed, happy household. Despite his anxiety, he could not but feel himself to be a substantial citizen and freeholder as he went forth over the new-fallen snow to consult with his neighbours.

Miss Penny asked anxiously for the baby. He replied that little Joe was prime but that Anna had felt wretchedly all day and was really ill to-night. While her mother was getting her to bed he had come over to see if they had any suggestions.

"The worst of it is, we can't consult Mr. Langley," said Miss Penny in her fluttered way. "He always knows just what to do, but—there's his wife, you see. What I mean is—of course, I am as pleased as anyone—and that alone wouldn't hurt Anna—nor perhaps the other alone—I am not sure—but racing home to little Joe—and all her school work—and standing all day when she was clerking in the city. And as you say, Seth, it was unfortunate, his crying the first time. But we mustn't blame the little fellow. Anna says she looks like Red Riding-Hood's grandmother—no, I believe it was like the wolf dressed up in the grandmother's night gown, though I don't suppose he's heard that story or would understand it if he had."

"No'm, you're right. Not yet, Miss Penny," Miller assured her politely.

"What does Anna's mother think?" asked Mrs. Lorraine.

"Jenny lays it all to the baby, mostly. She never took to him as the rest of us do, Mrs. Lorraine, and she frets more 'n I ever knew her to over Anna's having the care of him. And all the time, you know, he ain't much trouble."

"We might take him over here for a while, Mrs. Lorraine?" Miss Penny suggested.

"You'd only shift the trouble, Miss Penny," Miller declared. "Anna'd come along, too, and you'd be all wore out with the excitement and Jenny would be all the more worried. She thinks, too, Anna hadn't ought to go to Mrs. Langley's so often."

"After all, why should she go at all?" demanded Mrs. Lorraine with sudden spirit. "Why don't you put your foot down, Mr. Miller, that she sha'n't go there except in vacation?"

Seth Miller was flattered by the implication of her demand. But he knew as well as any that he wasn't one to set his foot down in any firm way in his own family.

"I guess I couldn't hardly do that, Mrs. Lorraine, for Anna might take it to heart," he said. "And you see we was without our daughter for five years."

"And consider what it means to Mr. Langley to have her go!" cried Miss Penny. "O Mrs. Lorraine, if you could know what store we set by that man—though I suppose you begin to guess by now. But you may not know how we all long to do something

for him—to show our appreciation—or perhaps to satisfy our own hearts—and it's so difficult—it's next to impossible. And she his wife, you know. If she should come out among people, he would be the happiest man alive."

"I fear she never will, Miss Penny," Mrs. Lorraine returned doubtfully. "She has been shut in too long. People like that grow selfish and exacting. She will never be willing to make the effort it would require to receive other people so long as she can have Anna, who just suits her. She'll cling to her and I fear will devour her youth."

The phrase impressed Seth Miller deeply. He repeated it more than once as he walked across with his lantern, sighing deeply with each repetition, though he had really been cheered by the promise the ladies had given him to consider the problem carefully.

He was amazed to find Anna, wrapped in a woollen dressing-gown, sitting by the kitchen stove with her mother and the boys. She had regained her colour and seemed herself again. As she shook back her short yellow locks, her father thought she looked like a posy swayed by the wind.

"O pa, what do you think! Here's a note from Mrs. Langley!" she cried. "I thought she'd be so mad after yesterday that she'd never want to see me again, but here she is begging to see me soon because she has something special to speak about. Mr. Langley will come for me and bring me back, she says, if I'll come

some night after school. Here it is—sort of funny writing, isn't it?"

As it never occurred to the other Miller girl to wait until she was stronger, she hurried over to the parsonage Monday afternoon. And her heart leaped with generous emotion when Mrs. Langley's first question was for the baby.

"Joe's right as rain, bless his heart, Mrs. Langley," she returned cheerfully. "Pa says it did him good to expand his lungs. You understand how it was, didn't you?"

Mrs. Langley evaded the question by asking another: "Who's with him now?"

"Ma's right there and the boys are minding him. You see,—I—I wanted to bring him with me so badly that I'm afraid I didn't try as I might have to get him taken care of. And anyhow the boys are getting better. What do you suppose? They took the pennies they have been saving for Christmas and sent over to Wenham by Walter Phelps and got him a perfectly scrumptious linen picture book with an animal for every blooming letter of the alphabet. They're perfectly dotty over teaching him to talk. Freddy thinks it will be easier now that he knows how to cry!"

"O, the baby isn't afraid of them?"

"O no, the baby isn't afraid of anybody," returned Anna before she had time to reflect. Then she flushed. "I mean he isn't afraid of anyone he's used to. Of course he's used to them."

"Then he'd get used to me?" Mrs. Langley half-asserted, half-questioned. Anna's heart sank.

"I guess Joe, Junior 'd better not go so far from home again until he's older," she said gently. "I ought to have known better. But I can come just the same. The boys have already offered to mind him Saturday."

"But I want to see *him* again," Mrs. Langley insisted. And Anna felt as if she were standing on her head, to have Mrs. Langley begging to see the baby and to be trying to hold her off.

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Langley, when he's a wee bit older," she temporized, but the other broke in impatiently. "Anna Miller! it's just because he's a baby that I want to see him. When he's older, I sha'n't care."

Anna sighed.

"He'll get used to me," Mrs. Langley urged. "I understand that he lets Mr. Langley hold him?"

"O, any child would go to Mr. Langley, he's so good and so——"

"So *what?*" demanded the minister's wife, so fiercely that Anna faltered the word she had meant to swallow: *handsome*.

"Anna Miller! Do you mean to tell me that I—that I frightened that baby by my looks?" cried the invalid yet more fiercely.

"You don't happen to look like anyone he's happened to see so far, nor—dress like 'em," Anna murmured deprecatingly.

"You'd hardly expect him ever to see anyone who

had suffered as I have all these years and lost everyone they ever cared for!"

"There's Mr. Langley," Anna reminded her.

"Of course. But he isn't like one's own child. Anna, will you go out and send Bell in to me. Then please wait until she comes for you."

Too sore and shocked to protest, Anna complied silently. She guessed that Mrs. Langley was about to consult a mirror. If she hadn't seen herself since—since the little lamb had been placed in the cemetery, she would—but Anna's imagination refused to compass the situation. She waited with mingled dread and terror for—she knew not what,

CHAPTER XV

BIG BELL'S voice was actually soft as she bade Anna return to her mistress, and the girl stole fearfully in. However, nothing dire had happened. Except that she was strangely subdued, Mrs. Langley was her usual self. But Anna's heart ached sadly.

She chattered lightly about the snow-fall and the interrupted skating. Mrs. Langley, who hadn't listened, presently broke in.

"Anna, what can I do to make—so that the baby won't be afraid of me?" she asked at once meekly and fiercely so that Anna shuddered. There was no answer to that riddle, but she plucked up a bit of spirit.

"It was partly the dark—the half dark, I mean. Junior's used to one thing or t'other. There's no twilight in our house any more than there was where he came from," she said, rather talking against time than making a suggestion. But the other took it as such.

"It would hurt my eyes, but I could have the blinds raised. Would he be all right then?"

Anna couldn't say that he would. She looked at Mrs. Langley pleadingly.

"You think he would still be afraid of me?"

"Why, he might be afraid of—the memory of you," the girl said reluctantly. "If you looked like—the lady

he saw in the dark room that made him cry, he might, I suppose——”

But the girl stopped short. No, he mightn't. Not for all the world would she subject that baby to the danger of a second fright.

“You think I ought to wear something light and pretty?” Mrs. Langley asked almost humbly.

“It would be nice if you should,” Anna returned in noncommittal fashion. “But if you did, you would have to fix your hair in some other way. Having it drawn back so tight wouldn't go with a nifty dress. Perhaps you could have it a bit looser about your face?”

Anna didn't know what possessed her. She had almost said *phiz*. And something within her added that *mug* wouldn't be bad. As she thought of a dainty, light gown and soft hair about that ugly yellow face, she had an hysterical impulse to laugh or to burst into tears.

“Perhaps he'd like it frizzed?” suggested Mrs. Langley. And then Anna laughed out naturally.

“O Mrs. Langley, one would think Joe, Junior, was royalty!” she exclaimed. And then she wanted to cry. *Frizzes* about that face!

“You're not well enough anyhow to bother about curl papers. Soft and loose would be just as well,” she murmured with a deepening sense of guilt. She had grown so used to Mrs. Langley that she had forgotten her ugliness until Saturday had impressed it forcibly upon her. She said to herself it was wicked

to talk against time as she was. Could that harsh-looking hair ever look smooth? And anyhow, she knew she would never venture to bring the baby hither again.

Mrs. Langley was staring at her. "I suppose he likes your hair, Anna?" she asked with something like craving in her voice.

"Rather. He's stuck on anything yellow. He clutches at the sunshine and he reached for Mr. Langley's watch."

"If I will have Bell put the blinds up as far as they will go, will you bring him again on Saturday afternoon, Anna?" Mrs. Langley asked almost eagerly, and added, "You'll have to come early to catch the sunshine, for there isn't any after the middle of the afternoon."

"O but Mrs. Langley, you could never stand the strong sunlight all at once. Your poor eyes! You must let it in little by little!" protested the girl.

Mrs. Langley looked hard at her. "Anna Miller! You have made up your mind you won't bring him," she declared.

"I don't want him to cry again. Neither do you; so it's partly for your sake," Anna declared.

"But you said he wouldn't cry if I did all that?"

Anna remained silent.

"You did say so?"

"Not exactly that. I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid that even after all that it wouldn't go."

"What do you mean?"

"I really can't tell. I'm not sure that I know. But I will come myself just the same."

Mrs. Langley sat almost erect. When it had happened, Anna did not know, but she noticed now for the first time that the hump was gone. "I don't want you without him," she cried, "and I want to know the truth. Why should he be afraid of me after I had done all that?"

"Because—O, if everything else was all right, he would be afraid of—your teeth!" the girl cried desperately. "They're so—far apart—there's a gap on each side. He hasn't many, himself, but they're close up and anyhow he doesn't know what he looks like. When I hold him up to the mirror, what do you think he does. He looks right at me!" And the girl laughed nervously.

It was all she could do to restrain her tears. It seemed to her as if she could not endure it for another minute. But when Mrs. Langley spoke she forgot herself in the great wave of pity that flooded her heart.

"Well, I suppose if it's that, there's no help for it, and I may as well give up," the woman said in an old, weary voice. "You feel quite sure, Anna?"

"You could have some put in?" Anna suggested colourlessly. Then as she went on, her voice showed the confidence she gained. "You'd be a lot more comfortable, too. The dentist would come over from Wenham, you know. He came way over to the Hollow to draw a tooth for Miss Penny."

For a few moments there was silence. The room was dark now. Anna moved, and Mrs. Langley spoke fretfully.

"And you would have me go through all that for a baby, Anna Miller?"

"Never. Never in the world. Only—you might do it for other reasons. Mr. Langley might like it," Anna suggested timidly.

His wife was apparently surprised, perhaps startled. As she hadn't thought of Mr. Langley's being handsome until Anna recalled it to her mind, so it would not have occurred to her that her personal appearance could be of moment to him.

"Why don't you surprise him?" the girl suggested eagerly. "Pretend you want a tooth pulled or—why need he know about it at all until it's done? He's out so much it would be dead easy."

"The excitement would kill me," remarked Mrs. Langley.

"Then I shouldn't think about it," said Anna quite as decidedly. "After all, lots of women look older than their husbands. Ma doesn't, but Mrs. Mudge does and Mrs. Graham—Mabel's mother—and—no end of others."

Mrs. Langley had nothing to say but her silence seemed eloquent—fiercely eloquent to Anna, and she took leave hastily, promising to drop in again on Saturday. As she hurried home, she said to herself it was just as if she had sat in a dentist's chair all afternoon and ached all over now.

That night as she lay in bed, she said to herself that that was the end of everything. And she feared that she was more relieved than disappointed. It would be cruelly hard to part with the baby and her heart leaped at the thought of keeping him always. And she owned to her innermost heart that she should be glad of a rest from going to the parsonage. She would have more time for Joe, Junior, and for Alice. She and Alice could enjoy him together, and—dear me, she had quite forgotten those absurd rumours about Alice! She must do something at once.

She was sincerely sorry so far as Mr. Langley was concerned. But she had done her level best. She would have given him the baby though it had half killed her, but she had failed to 'put it over'. She must always be sorry for that part of it, for most likely he would grow old with a vengeance now and she would be obliged to sit by and watch him going headlong down hill. Well, and she was sorry for Mrs. Langley, too. Somehow, she seemed to have a certain affection for her—a queer, maternal sort of affection as if a downy yellow chick wanted to mother and brood an ugly old hen. If only someone had taken her earlier!

The next day was a day of profound discomfort. But on Wednesday, a note was brought to the Hollow from the parsonage asking Anna to come to see Mrs. Langley on Saturday week at two o'clock and bring the baby with her. Consternation seized upon her, and

settled into despair. But she felt constrained, and before night sent back word that they would come.

At first she was thankful for the ten days respite. Then she felt the suspense would kill her. But very shortly she had no time to worry over that or anything else except after she got into bed at night and then she was too tired. For suddenly Alice Lorraine began to seek and claim her companionship as she had never done before, and the girls became practically inseparable.

Anna always enjoyed Alice, and with Alice and Joe together would have been blissfully happy but for the lurking apprehension with regard to the Saturday facing her. And when she forgot that, it was because she recollected the mystery connected with Alice, who had ceased her wandering and seemed to her mother and Miss Penny to be herself again. But Anna knew better: she wasn't at all the same girl she had been before the day Anna had found her at the dark cottage in the lane. She had moments of high spirits, but they did not last. She clung to Anna, but she was still nervous and absent minded. Anna was forced to guess that the reason she no longer went back and forth between the Hollow and the lane was because the person she met there or the occasion of her going was no longer thereabout. But although Alice was not happy nor at her ease, neither was she really unhappy as she must have been had it—whatever it had been—been over and the parting final.

If the strange man she had walked with were her

father, then Anna had no fear. If he had escaped from prison and his daughter had helped him, Anna was only too glad. She would have been glad to help him herself. But if it weren't—and how could it be? Why should Alice have exhibited that uncanny interest in Reuben's past if the man was her father? If he wasn't her father, if he were some younger man—Anna wouldn't admit it even to herself, but something kept trying to tell her that Alice acted now just as a girl would who was planning to run away—to elope. Still, that did not explain her interest in Reuben. Alice didn't question any more, it is true, but she was all eagerness whenever Reuben was mentioned. But nothing could be more absurd, if one knew Reuben, than to connect him in any way with the man with whom Alice had been seen or with the occasion of her solitary rambles.

In the midst of this, happily for Anna, a counter-excitement arose. A change came over Joe, Junior, which, slight as it might have seemed to another, thrilled the heart of his foster-mother. On a sudden he began to take an interest in the world about him and the passing scene. A faint flicker of colour appeared upon his little old man's face which looked less mournful and forlorn. He held everything that was put into his hands, examining it gravely from every angle, and evinced a real interest in the animals in his gay picture book, viewing them as seriously and intently as if he were making weighty deductions in

natural history or even biology, though his silence remained unbroken.

The December day fixed for the visit at the parsonage dawned clear and fine and remained unclouded up to sundown. Anna set out promptly in order to catch the mid-day beams upon those western windows that had shut out the sun for so many annual revolutions. The snow had disappeared, save in patches facing the north, and the air was genial. Joe, Junior, was almost rosy, looked calmly content and less serious than his wont. Anna wore her Sunday suit of hunter's green with the coquettish little cocked hat perched on her short locks and looked like a handsome young prince. Strange to say, however, she was quite unaware of her appearance. She hadn't glanced at a mirror except to put in her brooch, and her face was very grave. None knew how the girl dreaded the ordeal, but Mrs. Lorraine, who drove her over with the fat pony, guessed something.

She exclaimed over the baby's improvement, praised the green suit and thought the little hat was even more becoming with bobbed hair. Anna smiled absently but sighed almost immediately.

"Anna, you don't feel like going this afternoon? Let me take you back home and then go over to the parsonage and make your excuses?" Mrs. Lorraine begged.

"O no, Mrs. Lorraine. I'm really wild to go—in a way," Anna declared. "I'm sure everything's going

to be all right to-day, only—I seem to be pulled all ways at once. You see—well,—Freddy came to me this morning in tears and said he heard ma advising pa not to buy a piano-forte—not to put his money into it. She said with an extra mouth to feed he'd better hold on to it."

"Well, perhaps there isn't any special hurry about the piano," Mrs. Lorraine returned, not venturing to express at this time the sympathy she felt. And she endeavoured to distract Anna's attention by speaking of the butter she and Miss Penny had made that week, the market price and the new mould. And Anna forgot her own perplexities and was quite herself when they reached the parsonage.

It was Bell Adams who met her at the door to-day. The expression on her face was such as to puzzle Anna and rather to frighten her. She spoke in hoarse whispers and made strange grimaces, and suddenly Anna's heart failed her. But she had promised. Slipping off the baby's wraps hastily, she took him and hurried to the door of Mrs. Langley's room without stopping to remove her own jacket. She opened the door desperately. Just within, she paused. She expected a change, but—what had happened?

CHAPTER XVI

THE blinds were raised high and the sun streamed in over so brilliant a Brussels carpet that the carefully cherished one in Miss Penny's parlour would have seemed almost dingy beside it. And the dimness having vanished, the room seemed to have expanded—to have thrust out its boundary walls in all directions. Extra furniture had been moved in—though not, probably, on that account—which imparted an hospitable if rather grotesquely amusing air. There were chairs of all shapes and sizes, tables and stands, hassocks, an extra what-not, an Indian cabinet, and such an array of tidies, antimacassars, lambrequins, and afghans as only a country parsonage can collect through various periods and many years of 'fancy work.' One of the larger of the extra tables held the parlour clock, which was surmounted by a bronze statuette representing a barefooted maiden with a pitcher, and the other, the great silver water-pitcher with elves clambering over the handle which had been the wedding gift from the church. The medicine bottles had been cleared away and the stand that had held them was adorned only by the framed photograph of little Ella May's monument resting on a gay mat of shaded red worsteds.

Nevertheless it was not this transformation which the other Miller girl noticed first, nor was it considerable in comparison with the real transformation. After a vague, momentary realisation of the sunshine and the gorgeous purple and crimson roses of the border of the carpet, the girl was lost in wonder as she stared incredulously at the figure in the familiar yet strange armchair.

Mrs. Langley—if it were, indeed, Mrs. Langley?—wore a gown of warm grey shading into lilac with a lace fichu fastened by a large, handsome cameo brooch. Her parted hair was brought back so loosely as considerably to disguise the sharpness of her temples. Her eyes looked softer and her skin less sallow even in the strong light; while, most remarkable of all, the appalling hollows in her cheeks had disappeared, taking with them almost all the grimness of the mouth. And when she actually smiled, partly with her eyes yet also with her lips, Anna lost her head. She forgot all the neat, deprecatory little speeches she had prepared for every emergency save this overwhelming surprise.

“O Mrs. Langley! you look simply *swell!*” she cried, dropping into a three-cornered chair that might have seemed perilously near. “And here’s little Joe, Junior, come way across the city from the Hollow to the Bowery to tell you he’s going to celebrate his first Christmas in ten days.”

She held her breath. But the baby surveyed the scene calmly with that new keenness of observation of his. Apparently nothing suggested to him that it

was the same wherein he had been so terrified a fortnight since. He stared coolly at the lady in the flowered chair, the lotos blossoms and birds of paradise of which hadn't been visible in the darkened room, scrutinizing her gravely but without either recognition or disapproval.

None the less, it was only with a tremendous effort of will that Anna rose and deliberately put the child into Mrs. Langley's arms. For a moment her heart stood still. But to-day there was no scream. Little Joe did not even seek to come back to Anna. His gravity seemed, indeed, rather to lift than to deepen. He cuddled down in the stranger's arms in a manner that implied an absent-minded desire to be comfortable while he completed his survey. For he made haste to study the bright colours of the worsted mat. Thence his gaze roved to the photograph in the frame. He looked at it hard, glanced at the lady who held him then turned to Anna.

"Baa-baa!" he exclaimed suddenly, very clearly and rather dramatically and stretched out his little hand towards the picture.

Mr. Langley being summoned, had also to pause on the threshold. He was almost overwhelmed by the transformation, for which he was wholly unprepared. For Big Bell had helped her mistress carry through everything without his knowledge. He hadn't so much as had inkling of the fact that the blinds had been raised every day a bit higher and for

progressively longer intervals leading up to this handsome crisis. He felt absolutely dazed as he looked at his wife, as if he, too, had been dwelling in semi-darkness the while. He hadn't seen her clearly for years upon years and one might have expected the strong light now to be disillusioning rather than flattering. But not so. Russell Langley could scarcely believe that the comely looking woman in the gay, flowered chair with the child cherished in her arms was his wife,—nor, indeed, that he was himself.

But somehow when his eyes wandered and fell upon the other Miller girl, the sight of her steadied him. Anna was as real as she was true blue. Wherefore everything was real, even that splotch of sunshine on the purple and crimson carpet which had so enchanted his youthful masculine fancy.

"What are you standing there for, Russell?" asked his wife in a voice and with a manner that were singularly what they would have been had husband and wife come through the twenty years hand-in-hand instead of separately. "Come here and listen to this wonderful baby."

He obeyed as one in a dream. But when he stood over her, as he bent and kissed her, it cost him an effort not to try to take the child from her into his own arms. Mrs. Langley pointed her lean finger towards the lamb in the picture.

"What's that, baby? What's that, darling child?" she begged his royal highness to declare.

"Baa-baa," returned the child, and looking up to

Anna almost smiled. The girl dropped at his feet enraptured. Then she caught sight of the giantess as she had endeavoured to peep in unseen and called her in. Bell joined the group in an instant.

"O an' the little angel he is, ma'am!" she exclaimed. "O to have him in me arrums but the oncet. Would he come to the likes of me, Miss Anna?"

"Sure, Bell," said Anna, though Mrs. Langley frowned upon the bold request. But Big Bell held out her great strong arms, and, the baby responding with unusual readiness, gathered him tenderly into them. Mrs. Langley, who yielded him ungraciously, watched Bell suspiciously as she marched about the room with him, showing him the colleen on the parlour clock and the wee people on the silver water-pitcher. But when Bell put a bright blue worsted mat with a fringe of tassels on top of her head and cocked it at the baby, winking one eye, and the baby actually and unmistakably smiled, Mrs. Langley smiled, too. Nevertheless, she couldn't endure it another second and demanded that Joe, Junior, be returned to her at once.

Bell was bold enough to ask her if she felt she was strong enough, and then gave him up reluctantly. "I've a way with 'em same's ever," she declared defiantly. "I brought up my sister's babies till her man married again, and when I first went into service it was as a nurse." She would have gone on, but suddenly her feelings overcame her and she turned and fled.

On her way home, Anna prudently decided to say

nothing of the marvel of the baby's talking until after he should have gone to sleep. After that had happened she related the story dramatically to the assembled family.

They were all greatly excited, but the boys were wild with anticipation and could scarcely wait until morning. Though it was Sunday and dark, they were up and dressed at six o'clock and had a long, weary wait before the hero made his appearance. But the instant Joe, Junior, finished his porridge, they fetched his picture book. It was already open at L and Anna was as much delighted as they when he promptly said Baa! to the lamb.

"Ask him something else, quick!" cried Freddy, as if there were not a moment to lose.

"O Freddy, that's no fair. He's only a baby. You musn't expect too much of him," cautioned Anna.

"No, indeed, Fred Miller, don't you dare turn that page," added the elder brother sternly. "You'll get him mixed up and scared and then he'll never say baa again. Don't you dare. We'll practise him a while on this now."

Freddy snatched the book, opened it at random in his haste, and before Frank could interfere demanded of the baby what *that* might be. The choice was unfortunate, *that* being an hippopotamus with a gaping red mouth.

"Moo moo!" cried the baby almost dramatically, and the boys shouted for joy. Then alike unmindful of threats and warnings, they went through the book,

and the astonishing baby had an answer for every question. He wasn't always right, but he only appeared the more clever. He said *bow-wow* for the camel but he gave a really creditable roar for the cinnamon bear.

In truth, Joe, Junior, seemed to have come into his own. Not only did Anna and the boys hang over him spell-bound and Seth Miller seem glued to the spot, but Mrs. Miller left her work not only patiently but eagerly whenever the boys summoned her, and once she bent over the baby and kissed him.

Not long after the others had gone to service, Mrs. Lorraine came in. She made Anna lie down on the sofa and sat beside her.

"I understand the baby has begun to talk," she observed.

"O Mrs. Lorraine! Already? Who told you?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Your father and mother and Frank each told me separately, and Frank and Freddy together. And Miss Penny told me last evening. Mr. Langley told someone and Mr. Phelps heard it at the post office."

"I'm glad ma told you," Anna remarked. "She's beginning to take to him. She kissed him this morning."

Mrs. Lorraine sighed. Anna had been pale when she came in. Now her cheeks were crimson and her eyes too bright. She was always thin, but to-day her face looked pinched. Anna was second only to Alice herself in Mrs. Lorraine's heart.

"Anna, I wish you would find a home for that baby or let some of us," she said anxiously. "The responsibility is too much for you. Many people would be glad to take him, I am sure."

"Glad! my goodness, they'd jump at the chance!" rejoined Anna. "And well they might. I did think that I would give him away, but I don't believe now that I could part with him. And it's different now. The boys are crazy over him and so is pa. And now that ma——"

Mrs. Lorraine perceived that she had taken the wrong tack. She must try again.

"But Anna, having him keeps you from so many things. They really need you in the choir, you know."

"Alice might sing in the choir. Her voice is better than mine and she knows heaps more about music."

"Alice wouldn't go in without you, and her voice really isn't so sweet. And your mother needs you, Anna. Like most mothers, she has been tied at home for years, and it seems a pity that just as she begins to go about she should lose your companionship. And your school-mates——"

As Anna sat up, suddenly she looked so distressed that Mrs. Lorraine's heart failed her. She had never been a very considerate woman—hadn't taken any thought to avoid hurting the feelings of others. But she must have become more sensitive of late. Certainly it hurt her to hurt the girl before her.

"You see, dear child, you are just the sort of person everyone wants a share of, but little Joe quite

monopolises you," she went on more gently. "You and Alice were reading *Retaliation* the other day, you know. Well, you're like the line on Burke. You give up to Joe, Junior, what was meant for mankind."

Anna laughed, though ruefully. She rose and made a movement to smooth her hair, then remembered that her braid was gone and shook her short locks. Seating herself in a straight chair, she folded her hands over her knee.

"One reason why I hate to give him up, Mrs. Lorraine, is because he's Bessy's baby and Joe's," she began wistfully. "He's the only part of them and of that life that I've got left, you see. Not that I want ever to go back to it. I love the Hollow and Farleigh and all the people, and yet there's something that makes me feel I don't want to forget the other altogether. Bessy wore a pompadour that made even me shiver and she chewed gum, and Joe would have looked like a jumping-jack beside Reuben, and yet Bessy and Joe were both true blue. Bessy got all run down while Joe was sick going without things so that he could have milk and eggs, and when he got back to work he went without lunches so that she would think his pay was the same as it had been. And if Hazel or I or any of their friends had had hard luck, they would have taken them in and done everything for them the same as Hazel did for Bessy when the time came."

She looked entreatingly into Mrs. Lorraine's dark eyes, which were sympathetic but perplexed.

"You can't understand how it is, unless you live right among them, but if you once have, there's something mighty precious in the memory of that life that you wouldn't lose hold of. If I didn't want Joe, Junior, myself, I should want him because he's Bessy's and Joe's," she said earnestly.

The girl was very quiet all the rest of the day. She pondered sadly over what Mrs. Lorraine had said and over what her words had further implied. She had not realised that they had missed her, her mother and the boys and Miss Penny and Alice—Alice most of all, perhaps, though her mother didn't dream that. Perhaps she could do things for them that others couldn't, while the baby would really be better off with the Langleys. Mr. Langley and Bell Adams would be wonderful with him and it began to look as if Mrs. Langley would make a creditable mother. And Alice needed her; and Alice's mother needed something in Alice which perhaps only Anna could watch out for. And Alice had never been really happy until she was twenty and Mrs. Lorraine not until she was forty-five. And both had been so frightfully unhappy. And there was that terrible black shadow of the prison hanging over them for ten years to come.

Giving up Joe, Junior, was of course only what she had planned to do in the first place. It was only what she had worked and struggled for ever since she had returned with the baby. And even before that, she had been longing to discover some means of repaying Mr. Langley for all he had done for Rusty and her

family in general and to comfort him for losing his little Ella May after all the years. Yet now that she had it within her power to give him something that would be like his heart's desire, she was grudging it. But O—that darling baby! And he loved her as he cared for no one else.

On a sudden, Anna decided to go to evening service. She had kissed the baby in his sleep and almost thought he smiled, and as she flew over the frozen ground, her heart grew light again. Her own words came back to her. "The baby loves me best." They echoed in her heart and she almost danced along to their melody. He loved her best and therefore he belonged to her as he could belong to no other. For, after all, there was nothing like love. Advantages and all sorts of material goods couldn't compete with it. She was going to keep Joe, Junior, always.

CHAPTER XVII

ANNA MILLER went forth exultantly, hugging the certainty to her heart that Joe, Junior, loved her best and that she had, therefore, a right to keep him to grow up in an household wherein everyone loved and wanted him. But all her elation died out at the sight of Mr. Langley's face as it looked down from the pulpit. He looked as he had never looked before, and the girl knew only too well that it was all because of the baby's visit to the parsonage yesterday. He looked weary—at once wistfully and radiantly weary. He looked as if he had been through floods and stood on mountain summits. He looked, poor dear, as if he ought to have a darling, cuddling, prattling baby at the parsonage all the time.

So the question was unsettled again and settled the other way, though Anna lay awake for hours that night before she announced the painful decision formally to herself. And even then she did not dare trust herself until she had burned all her bridges behind her. She hastened over to the parsonage late Monday afternoon.

At the door, Big Bell enquired eagerly though shyly for the blessed baby. When Anna told her of his feats with the picture book, Bell laughed and choked and got out of the way quickly to conceal her tears.

Anna's eyes were moist as she entered Mrs. Langley's room.

"O Mrs. Langley, what do you think now?" she cried, and proceeded to relate the story of the pictures at greater length. And as she told it, she and Mrs. Langley laughed and cried together in new intimacy.

"Why didn't you bring him with you?" Mrs. Langley asked wistfully. And the girl's heart sank to feel how fatally easy it was to be to give away the baby. She spoke very low in order to keep her voice steady.

"Because—O, Mrs. Langley, I don't think we'll keep little Joe. We all love him—even ma, but we don't really need him and—don't you know someone who would like a baby boy that talks?"

Mrs. Langley stared at the girl. The blinds were raised to-day, though not so high, and she wore the pretty gown and becoming arrangement of her hair. She looked even more attractive than she had on Saturday, for she seemed used to the change. It was almost as if she had always let in the sunshine and the rich rosy afterglow which prevailed now and had never resembled Red-Riding-Hood's wolf in her grandmother's cap and gown. And Anna jumped at the conclusion any young or immature person might have made that the transformation within must be as complete and thorough.

"Wouldn't you like him yourself—you and Mr. Langley?" she asked gently. "If so, I'll give him to you as a Christmas present."

Mrs. Langley only stared the more blankly. The idea was absolutely new and strange to her mind and therefore startling. Never in all her life before had she been so surprised, so astounded.

Then suddenly a sharp twinge of neuralgia, zigzagging up her face into her head converted her confusion into a sort of blind rage. As it died away, it left her with a sensation of faintness and sickness.

"I don't know what you are thinking of, Anna Miller, to—to—upset me so!" she cried querulously. "Of course we couldn't have him here and I an invalid! It would kill me—break my heart."

As for Anna, she was quite confounded. Absolutely unprepared for the refusal of the precious gift it had cost her so much to proffer, the repetition of that hateful, meaningless phrase irritated her keenly. But for Mr. Langley's sake, she spoke with measure.

"But Mrs. Langley, I thought you were better—a heap better," she protested. "Tell me, does your head ache at this very minute?"

Mrs. Langley considered, or tried to do so. "I can't tell," she snapped. "I think it must, but I am so wrought up I'm sure I can't tell. But I know this. As soon as you go, I shall find myself suffering torture, and it's likely to keep up all night."

"I am so sorry. I didn't mean to excite you," murmured Anna meekly. "But Joe, Junior, wouldn't excite you, not a bit. And he wouldn't be any trouble even to a worse invalid than you were when you were

at your very sickest. He isn't at all like other babies. Big Bell would take all the care of him—she knows how to handle 'em and she's crazy about him already. And Mr. Langley would play with him—he'd love to, too—and then whenever you wanted to see him and hear the little love talk, why all you'd have to do would be to have him brought in—ask Bell for him."

"And like as not Bell would have an excuse all ready. I know Bell Adams better than you do, Anna Miller! She'd keep him to herself all the time and when I wanted him, she'd say he was having a nap. And he'd like Mr. Langley better than he would me and he wouldn't come to me from him. And—O dear, O dear, why did you come here with your wild notions stirring me up so that I sha'n't get a wink of sleep all night!"

Anna looked desperately and forlornly at the big purple roses. A long pause ensued which Mrs. Langley finally broke.

"Anna, I would like to have you bring the baby over here just as often as you can," she said in a conciliatory way. "Of course it wouldn't be wise for me to have him in the house all the time in my delicate state of health, as you would know if you were older or had had experience with illness. But I would dearly love to have you bring him over every day besides all Saturday afternoons."

Slow to anger as the girl was, she wasn't proof against this. She sprang to her feet.

"Not on your tintype!" she cried hotly. "That baby shall never come to this house again unless he comes to stay—never! never! I've got something else to do than tote him way over here every day, and if you want to see him days you've got to shelter him nights. Not that the darling has to go a begging for shelter, for I'm sure I don't want to give him away. But I'll give you one more chance. Do you want him to keep, or will you never look on his face again?"

Mrs. Langley began to remonstrate peevishly. Anna repeated her demand fiercely.

"O Anna, I couldn't think of doing that. It would break my heart," Mrs. Langley almost wailed. Anna turned at the door.

"Very well, then. It's settled," she cried, "and you shall never have him, never! I wanted to keep him myself and now I will and there'll be no more fussing about it. I shall give up my life to him and never marry. And, believe me, I shall never come near this house again!"

"I'm sure, I'm glad to hear that!" retorted Mrs. Langley. "Don't flatter yourself that it's any favour to me your coming here and ordering me round and stirring me all up in this fashion. I'll thank you to pull that curtain down and leave me alone."

Anna yanked at the blind viciously and down it came, fixture and all, with a sad crash. Startled out of her wrath, the girl was ashamed and confused. She was sick at heart, too, with the significance of it, the

drawing down of the blind that had let in light for only a fortnight out of twenty-odd years. But she fled precipitately, pausing only to send Bell in to her mistress. And she believed herself to be leaving the house forever.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON the day following her second meeting with the stranger who called himself John Converse, Alice Lorraine was in a sad state of mind when she reached the lane. She *had* to see the man again. She told herself that ordinary civility as well as her own desire demanded that. Chance had brought them together and put upon her the duty of aiding him so far as possible in looking up old associations without making himself known in the village of his birth and boyhood. She had somehow lost her head and become involved in a warm dispute. That made it hard for her to act to-day. But she told herself that she was not going back as the girl who had been vehement over—nothing! She was simply going to meet John Converse (for the last time, probably) in the odd little shop, give him such information as she was able, and if he should wish, help him plan his course of action. Then they would part in the polite way of people who have become acquainted in the course of a long railway journey and offered one another kindly civilities.

It would be simple enough, she told herself, if she could only remember that he belonged to an older generation. He didn't look young and he couldn't be,

with a memory reaching back as far as his did. It was only his sad eyes which could become so merry and the whimsical smile that transformed his gaunt face that had made her feel as if he were a companion of her own years.

As the girl stole around the cottage towards the path leading to the shop, John Converse rose quickly from the step of the back porch and joined her. He held out his hand eagerly and she put hers shyly into it, her face expressing the relief she felt to find that he was not resentful. She realised now that she had feared that if he were about at all he would be stiff and cold.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come," he said with a frank smile. "I have had a nasty night, I can tell you. And now I want to explain to you right away what must have seemed to you inexcusable behaviour. Shall we sit down here?"

Alice thought of his safety. And she suggested that they might as well go into the shop. As they entered, she noted that there was a fire and the same preparations for tea he had made the day before.

He took her jacket, made her comfortable, prepared the tea and served her. Alice, with a sense of relief that was like happiness, leaned back in her chair and watched him admiringly. She had never known a man to be so deft, and gazing at his hands she noticed that, though the skin was hard and rough and they must have done the work of a labourer, they were the long, sensitive, slender hands of the sculptor

or musician—probably the latter. And suddenly her lips puckered in an involuntary smile.

“What pleases you, if I may ask?” he said wonderingly. He himself was very serious,—sad, almost. There was no hint now of the whimsicality that made him so young—nor of the youthful impulsiveness with which he had met her to-day.

Alice looked into his eyes ingenuously. “I wouldn’t dare tell anyone else of the thought that came to me and made me smile,” she declared. “They would mob me, I am quite sure. You see everyone in this village—or everyone I happen to know—is simply mad about Reuben Cartwright. Honestly, I believe they consider him perfect—incapable of doing anything that’s not exactly the right thing. And I have heard so much raving about him that I believe I am catching the madness, or whatever you call it. Just now as you were handling the cups so skilfully it came suddenly to me that your hands were like Reuben’s—and mind you, I never saw the boy!”

He did not smile. He only looked at her curiously. Then he sat down opposite her.

“It wouldn’t be strange if they were alike,” he said quietly. “It’s odd, but you have led up to the explanation I was about to make. I feel, Miss Lorraine, that I owe it to you to tell you who I really am. You trusted me without a shred of evidence of my integrity, and you granted my wish for secrecy. I ought to have told you, anyhow. But having lost my temper and made shockingly uncivil remarks to you, I

cannot do otherwise. The reason I fired up when you were ready to believe ill—the worst—of Dick Cartwright is the same reason that Reuben Cartwright's hands and mine may look alike, though I trust his aren't so calloused and generally bunged up. I am Reuben Cartwright's father."

It wasn't, of course, the same shock to Alice Lorraine the announcement would have been to one who had known Richard Cartwright or his son Reuben. But the girl paled.

"But I thought he was dead—you, I mean," she said so naively that he smiled.

"I may be lean and lank, but I am a right husky ghost for all that," he said. Then he grew serious. "You were right in thinking so. I wanted everyone to believe me dead, and now I feel the same, except for you. It wasn't only bcause I wouldn't seem so rude if you understood that I wanted you to know, Miss Lorraine; but you seemed to think I was such a bad lot that I wanted you to know the truth. Not that I wasn't a bad lot, you know, only I wasn't quite such a scoundrel as you apparently think. Do you mind telling me just what impression Mr. Langley gave you of me? I believe under the circumstances you have the right to speak freely."

Alice complied briefly. Cartwright wiped his brow more than once.

"I went through a lot for nothing, then," he said almost bitterly. "If I had given my real name, I could have gotten off; but I feared the notoriety for Reuben

and took the name of a man that was killed, for the sake of giving him mine and having Reuben's father die a comparatively decent death instead of being a convict. I was on that train but the only thing wrong about my being there was that I didn't pay my fare. I was a tramp at that time and another tramp and I were riding the bumpers—he initiated me into the mysteries of the practise. He was killed and in the confusion of the wreck I was arrested as one of the gang that was responsible for it and for the deaths of the mail clerk and engineer. They couldn't prove anything, but circumstantial evidence implicated me as an accessory. My one hope of clearing myself would have been to establish my identity as Richard Cartwright, which, as I said, I did not choose to do. Wherefore I landed in the penitentiary."

The girl gave a little involuntary, startled, deprecating cry. Richard Cartwright faced her almost sternly with folded arms.

"You have been there—not ever since?" she protested. He told her that he had served two years of a sentence of five when the confession of a member of the gang who died of consumption had freed him.

"But why didn't you come back here then?" she cried.

"If you could have seen me the day after I left the prison, you wouldn't ask," he said bitterly. "I became a bum on the spot. I deliberately took up the drink habit again and became a drunkard and a tramp. I kept at it for three years—years that are almost a

blank to me now. Then something happened—I don't know what it was—that set me thinking of Reuben and Farleigh and Russell Langley and I decided to stop long enough to put myself into shape to come East and see if they were alive and how things were going on and all that. That was nearly a year ago. I stopped drinking, went to work, earned and saved money enough to clothe myself decently and to take this sight-seeing trip, and—here I am.”

Again he wiped his damp brow with his pocket handkerchief and looked at the girl—defiantly, bitterly, yet deprecatingly and wistfully.

“But why don't you stay, now?” she cried. “And why don't you see Mr. Langley and Reuben? Though I know Reuben only by hearsay, I know enough of him to know that he would be—*crazy* to see you.”

She smiled tremulously. “He's the faithful sort, if I'm not,” she said.

“O Miss Lorraine, don't hit a fellow who's down,” he begged.

“But you will—you will stay and—you will see them, Reuben and Mr. Langley?”

“No, Miss Lorraine, I cannot stay. And I'll see them, but I won't let them see me and I will remain dead to everyone but you just the same. I will roam about dear old Farleigh and see the changes, and I won't hurry, but—I'll go back presently. This is only a vacation,—a sight-seeing trip on the part of John Converse.”

“Back to what?” asked the girl imperiously.

"Back to being a good, honest day-labourer, if you say so, Miss Lorraine," he assured her.

"Well, but I don't say so," she retorted. "I want you to be a musician. I want you to have your old house back and to build——"

Her voice broke. He was silent a little. Then he reached forth his hard, beautifully shaped hands.

"Look at those—*hoofs!* On nearer view do they look like a musician's?" he asked.

"The hands do and you could easily soften the skin," she declared.

"I learned cobbling in prison and did it for two years," he remarked, and the girl paled sensitively, and her eyes fell.

"And my job now is work in a shoe factory, and so it must be for——"

"So it must not! No such thing!" she interrupted.

He smiled at her fire, and she thought he was ready to be persuaded. And for some little time, Alice Lorraine urged him to alter what she found to be a bitterly fixed determination. But she was still shaken and confused by the excitement and emotion she had undergone, and presently she gave over for the moment, feeling that she could do better by waiting until she should have pondered over the matter alone. However, she secured his promise not to return to the West without letting her know nor without seeing her. By that time it was late and agreeing to meet him the next day, she took leave.

The next day Dick Cartwright told her that he had

decided to remain hereabouts for a fortnight if he was lucky enough to escape detection, after which he would go to the town where Reuben was attending college, preferring to see him there rather than in Farleigh at the Christmas holidays. Then he would stop here and tell her about it on his way West. He begged her earnestly not to try to dissuade him. His purpose was fixed, and it only caused him intense pain to have her attempt to alter it.

Warm-hearted Alice agreed to desist temporarily at least and to help make his days in Farleigh successful whether they were only holidays or, as she continued secretly to hope, the beginning of a second residence. She learned all she could about Reuben to relate to his father when she met him, which was daily except when Alice was prevented from getting away, which happened only twice. She told him something more of Mr. Langley almost every time she saw him and learned the history of every person he mentioned any desire to know about. She helped him plan his nightly wanderings about the place, shared one of them and listened eagerly to what he told her of his experiences. She even managed to get him into the church one Sunday afternoon and to coax him to play a few bars on the familiar organ, the sight of which brought tears to his eyes. At moments when they were in good spirits they called themselves a pair of conspirators and wondered at the success which attended Dick Cartwright. For Alice assured him again and again that

no one dreamed of there being any stranger in the place.

The days flew over Alice Lorraine's head, her only regret being that she had no opportunity to plead with Dick Cartwright to reconsider his resolve. At home, as was perhaps not unnatural, she appeared nervous and was ready to be irritable as she had never been before. She was careless of others and remiss in her duties. And yet she was not utterly so. For a new feeling for her father had been aroused in her, a pity and sympathy the girl could never have experienced otherwise. She thought much of him and wrote him two long letters in the fortnight that elapsed before Dick Cartwright left Farleigh to go in search of Reuben.

On the night he was to leave, Alice, who was supposed to be in her room whither she had withdrawn early, met him at a point in the South Hollow which they had agreed upon. She entreated him to make himself known to his son and let him help make the final decision, but Cartwright was adamant.

"I couldn't explain to Reuben without letting him know that I have been in prison," he finally explained reluctantly and quite as if that ended the argument.

"Yes, but *innocently!*" she cried.

"That makes little difference. I would rather die than have Reuben know he is the son of one who has been a prisoner," he declared proudly.

Alice withdrew her arm from his. "You think it so

terrible a stigma as all that, Mr. Cartwright?" she demanded.

"I would rather die than have Reuben know it," he repeated warmly.

"*My* father is in prison now!" she cried. "And he—he is—he isn't innocent!"

CHAPTER XIX

“**W**E'RE goin' to have a green Christmas, sure's you're born,” remarked the usually stolid and reticent Bell Adams. “I only hope the rest of it don't follow. Dear me, if that delicate motherless baby should be took!”

“Bell Adams, I don't know what you mean, talking like that to me,” cried her mistress. Just because I've forced myself to endure the strong light and have changed a little outwardly, you treat me as if I were as well and strong as anyone. You used to be so careful, Bell.”

That was quite true,—also that Bell had borne herself differently of late. She had not, as a matter of fact, been the same woman since the visit of Anna Miller and Joe, Junior, when she had held the baby in her arms. And since she had in some manner come to understand that the child had been offered to the household and refused by Mrs. Langley, she had been so thoroughly indignant that she could scarcely speak to her mistress. But silence being her usual role, it was only when her anger had cooled into sulkiness that Mrs. Langley felt and resented the strangeness of her demeanour.

“And why you should pick out that little innocent

baby—" Mrs. Langley went on in an aggrieved voice.

"I ain't a-pickin' of him out," retorted Bell. "If anybody's doin' that it's the Lord, and if He's marked him out for early death, why, there you are. And anyways, the little mite hasn't no real home, so to speak. And he's too bright to grow up. He ought to be tenderly cherished with that bulgin' forehead, and his speakin' out so sudden and complete wasn't natural."

Mrs. Langley was too affected to reply. Bell hastened back to the kitchen, for it was the day before Christmas and she was deep in preparation.

Ten minutes passed and a shadow fell across her table. Bell looked up in amazement to see her mistress before her. Mrs. Langley had not left her room for years, and Bell was really frightened.

"For the dear sake, Mis' Langley, you out of your head?" she cried.

"No, Bell, but I felt upset. I wish you would come in and sit with me for a little, but you must be quiet. I don't want you to say a word. You stirred me all up with your chatter about green Christmases."

"But ma'am, I'm makin' cranberry jell, and I must get this mince pie into the oven for Mr. Langley's Christmas dinner," returned Bell.

She glanced at her mistress out of the tail of her eye, and, apparently deciding that she could go further with impunity, added:

"It's bad enough as it is, him a-eatin' of it all alone."

Mrs. Langley flushed. That woman was getting unbearable.

"If you pity Mr. Langley, I should like to know what you think of me, Bell Adams?" she cried. "I must not only eat alone but I am forced to remain alone all the time and to suffer constant pain."

"Yes'm, I know," Bell relented. "'Tis hard, dear knows. And yet, men are different from we women, and sometimes I mistrust they suffer as much from bein' lonesome as we do from real pain. And then of course he's been as good as a widower all these years and——"

"Bell Adams——"

"O, ma'am, you ought not to be standin' and in this hot kitchin and like a summer day outside and the twenty-fourth day of December. Now why don't you go into the front room and set a spell and watch the folks go by? They's a lot of passin' the day before Christmas, and you can see way to the post office now that the leaves is off. Rusty Miller's home, they say, and you may see her. You'll know her by her red hair. Everybody mistrusted she'd come home from college with it done up in a p'siky but it seems she ain't."

Mrs. Langley was tempted by her suggestion. It didn't seem as if she could go back to her room and think about green Christmases and that over-bright baby and Mr. Langley's having been like a widower all these years. Wherefore, when Bell went before and led her to the at once familiar and strange room, she

followed and allowed herself to be established comfortably in a big chair before the low window.

She had not been there ten minutes when she was secretly blaming Bell for not having thought of this before. Indeed, if it had not been for haunting thoughts of Anna and the baby, she would have been quite comfortable. It occurred to her that Joe, Junior, would like to be sitting on her lap looking out the window with her. There was a Newfoundland dog—she wondered if he would know what it was and say *bow-wow*?

As a matter of fact Joe, Junior, was saying *bow-wow* to every dog he saw that afternoon, thereby nearly convulsing Freddy Miller who walked at his side. The boys wheeled him all the way from the Hollow to the post office in his new perambulator.

Rusty had brought it home with her as a Christmas present for her sister. After she had gone away in the early autumn, Rusty had begun to feel as if she had been less than fair to Anna. She had been deeply impressed by her sister's devotion to the baby and by the sacrifice of her beautiful hair. It was like Rusty to desire to make her atonement concrete, and she had saved all her pocket money towards a Christmas present for Anna, expecting to get something handsome in the way of jewelry or other personal adornment. But when she had made secret enquiries of the family, no one knew of anything that Anna really wanted, except that Frank suspected she was saving her money for a perambulator for Joe, Junior. Whereupon Rusty pur-

chased an handsome carriage that was convertible into a sleigh.

Anna had been overwhelmed with delight. The perambulator had been placed in the parlour and covered by a sheet, that the baby should not see it before Christmas day.

Against this, however, the boys had protested loudly. They declared they wanted to be sure to use it before the runners should be put on, and everyone said there was a storm due, and it would be too mean for anything if they couldn't try the wheels before April. The baby was so little he wouldn't know the difference, anyhow. But Anna would not yield.

Reuben was to arrive at Wenham the day before Christmas, and Rusty was to drive over to meet him with Miss Penny's pony. It occurred to her that morning to ask Anna to go with her.

Anna flushed to the roots of her dandelion hair, as Frank called it. Then she remembered the baby and told Rusty she couldn't leave him.

"Ma's got baking to do, and I couldn't have her bothered, Rusty."

"But he'll sit on the floor and not be the least trouble," urged her sister.

"I don't like to risk anything now, Rusty," Anna confessed. "Ma didn't take to him at first, and now she's begun to, I don't want any setback. I want him to live with us always, you see."

"O, Anna, you'll never have any more fun then," protested Rusty.

"Junior's all the fun I want," returned Anna rather shyly.

"Well, anyhow, the boys can mind him this afternoon?"

"They could, but I don't believe they will. Frank's mad with me because I won't let him use the perambulator."

Rusty appealed to her mother.

"I'm afraid it's no use, Rusty," returned Mrs. Miller. "Frank's a good boy, but when he gets a contrary streak, he isn't to be coaxed. And I shouldn't like to *make* him mind the baby, for fear he might turn against him, and it's good for the boys to love him as they do now. But I'll look after him myself. He's no trouble at all; he's just company for me."

She sighed.

"I'm sorry I didn't make more of him when he first came," she owned. "Anna won't let me do anything for him except in school hours, and I want her to get into the notion of leaving him to me and getting out more herself. It was really for her sake that I sort of hardened my heart against the baby in the first place,—I felt it was too much for her."

Rusty kissed her mother and said she would try to see what she could do with Frank. She sought out her brother.

"Frank, you and Freddy'll mind the baby while Anna goes to Wenham with me to meet Reuben, won't you?" she begged. "You know I've been away so

long you haven't had a chance to do anything for me for weeks and weeks."

"Why Rusty Miller," the boy exclaimed, "ain't writing letters anything,—with ink, too! It takes the whole evening, even if you begin the minute the table cloth's off."

"Yes indeed, Frank, it's a lot, and it's a great comfort to get them," Rusty owned, "but answer me quick so that Anna can change her dress before dinner. And I'll tell Reuben how good you are."

"Fred and me was going to the post office to see the Christmas mail come in," objected Frank. "Anna won't let us haul Joe in our cart so far as that on account of the bumps, but if you'll let us take the perambulator we'll mind him dandy."

Rusty argued with him but found that her mother was right, and presently yielded.

"Well, do take it," she said, "only wait until we're out of the way. I'll tell Anna, but be sure she doesn't know it to-morrow. Wipe the wheels all off as soon as you get back."

She and Anna went away directly after dinner in order to wander about Wenham and see the Christmas decorations before time for Reuben's train. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Miller got the baby into his wraps and put him into the perambulator. The child looked at the new equipage with interest and approval and settled himself comfortably among the cushions with an expression that was almost eager. Mrs. Miller kissed him.

"Frank, don't you feel a little ashamed when Anna's so good to you to be doing just what she doesn't want you to?" she asked.

Frank looked rather sheepish.

But Joe, Junior, was almost smiling.

"Well, perhaps one day won't make any great difference," Mrs. Miller admitted indulgently.

"Say *Go*, baby," urged Frank, and the child complied instantly.

"Now don't hurry," cautioned their mother. "And Freddy, don't dance up and down that way. It's long enough there and back if you just walk without any capers. And besides, if you jump about too much that safety pin will give and your stocking will be all down around your foot."

Of course Freddy forgot the warning. Joe, Junior, repeating *Go, go*, Freddy was in an ecstasy, and was hardly out of sight before his stocking was trailing in the dust. The day being unseasonably warm he rather liked it so, and didn't mind the halting gait it induced. But Frank objected to the latter, and drawing the stocking up over the little boy's trousers, fastened it securely if not elegantly with the safety pin. Whereupon they rushed on and reached the post office an hour before the mail was due.

After a little the elder brother went inside, cautioning the younger not to wheel the carriage while he was gone. When Freddy grew tired of waiting, he moved it, pushing it sidewise, and went in to tell Frank

that the sun was shining right into the baby's eyes, and couldn't he just wheel him into the shade?

But when he entered, the post master was telling his brother how many parcels had come on the stage a year ago on the twenty-fourth of December, and what he calculated would have been their combined weight in pounds. He put it to Frank how many ounces that would be, and Freddy stood spell-bound while his brother computed it 'in his head.' Further delay was occasioned by the fact that Frank got his answer according to the avoirdupois scale and had to be reminded that he should have used the Troy, and to multiply all over by sixteen, which was more difficult than reckoning by the dozen.

When finally the matter was settled, the little boy put his request.

"Of course, silly," returned Frank, and went on talking with the postmaster. Presently Freddy returned.

"He ain't there," he said in a dazed way.

"What you givin' us?" demanded his brother.

Freddy burst into tears. "He ain't there, cross my neck, Frank. Nothin' but a pillow," he declared, "O, O, the bears must 'a eat him up!"

Frank rushed out. The perambulator was indeed empty. For an instant he stared at it in amazement. Then he decided it was a trick of some of the boys in Farleigh and tip-toed about peering into all possible and impossible corners and hiding-places. But there was no one in sight.

CHAPTER XX

SETH MILLER returned home shortly after the boys. Greatly alarmed, he rushed over to Miss Penny's and frightened her still more. But Mrs. Lorraine spoke calmly and suggested that he get Walter Phelps to drive him over to the post office, enquiring all the way, and if he did not find the baby meantime, some one in the crowd collected for the mail would be sure to have tidings of him.

The stage was late and they reached the post office just as it drove up. Anna stepped out, white and anxious. She had learned the news at Wenham just in time to catch the coach.

The girl did not lose an instant. She consulted the post master who had enquired of every one who had come in. He had no information to offer. Her father had stopped at every house except the parsonage, Miss Penny having cautioned him not to go there because of the invalid. Wherefore Seth Miller supposed that they had better be working over Wenham way.

But Anna decided otherwise. Asking Walter to remain at the post office for possible tidings, she had her father drive her to the parsonage. Three minutes after she had let herself quietly in, she came running out to the buggy.

"Mrs. Langley's gone, too," she said. "Dear me, isn't it great luck that Mr. Langley's way at the further end of the Hollow? We met him, and I suppose he's talking school business with Mr. Phillips. He'd be perfectly crazy, you know."

She climbed into the buggy.

"Did you look in the garret?" her father enquired.

"I don't know about that, but Bell went everywhere else," Anna returned. Her father stared at her for she seemed less anxious.

"Anna, someone may have kidnapped the two of 'em," he said hoarsely. "I don't know as you have heard, but they do say there's a strange man around the village peering in windows at night and the like."

Anna almost laughed. "They'd bring Mrs. Langley back when daylight came," she returned flippantly.

She directed her father to drive down the Wenham road, beyond the house where they had lived when the boys were babies, to the bridge and to watch from there, dropping her at a point she would indicate.

"Give me your bandana," she ordered. "Now, Pa, if you see me waving it, you come straight towards it as far as you can come with a horse and wait. I'm going cross lots but you may see me later against the western sky line."

"O Anna, I don't dare have you go off alone away from beaten tracks with strange men and kidnappers about," he protested. "Let me hitch the horse and go with you."

But Anna laughed, reassured him, and disappeared.

Making a bit of detour to avoid being seen, she headed for the cemetery. Anxious still, she was nevertheless relieved, and once on the direct path, ran all the way, leaping ditches, pushing through underbrush and taking the steepest part of the bank as if it were a plain. When she reached the top, she was hot and breathless. Throwing her jacket on top of the wall, she valuted it lightly and made for a point whence she could see the Langley lot. Even while she caught her breath and wondered if she should dare look, she heard a little familiar sound.

The girl stopped short. For a second she could not move. The complete relief from suspense was so great that she had to choke back her tears. For there they were, just where she had hardly dared to think of them as being, Mrs. Langley wrapped in a gay old-fashioned paisley shawl with her head uncovered, sitting on the ground with Joe, Junior, in her lap. The baby was fondling the little marble image and murmuring baa-baa, the while Mrs. Langley looked on as if she were in Paradise.

As she stole towards the little group and stood before them, Anna was unaware that tears were streaming down her cheeks. The baby saw her first and smiled. "Baa-baa" he cried out stretching out his hands, and Mrs. Langley looked up quickly. Her expression changed instantly from beatitude to deep guilt.

"You said you would give him to me for a Christmas present, anyhow, Anna," she declared, half defiantly, half-entreatingly.

"Yes, but you didn't—take him," gasped Anna dropping down beside them. She was hugging Joe, Junior, but she did not take him into her arms.

"I'm sorry I didn't. I've been sorry ever since. But you took me so by surprise. Of course I really wanted him when I could straighten out my thoughts."

"We have all been frightened nearly to death thinking the little fellow was lost," Anna remarked reproachfully.

"I didn't think of that," Mrs. Langley returned meekly, stroking the baby's little hand. "I saw him go by and I wanted to see him so badly that I got my shawl and followed as far as the post office. He was all alone and so near the road that a horse might have run over him if it shied. Really, Anna, I was just meaning to stand by him until your brothers came out, but he reached out his little hands and I had to take him—he knew me, you see. For he said Baa-baa, and it seemed as if he was asking me to bring him to see this little lamb; and as I wanted to see it myself, I brought him up here."

"Brought him up here!" exclaimed Anna suddenly realizing the magnitude of the action. "How in this world did you ever do it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but he didn't seem heavy. He's so still, I suppose. I didn't mean to stay at all, but it is so warm and pleasant, and baby has been so happy that I forgot everything else.

Meanwhile, Seth Miller had driven out to the bridge

and waited, talking the while to the Phelps horse which, like most of the horses in the village, was a great pet and like one of the family. Presently he caught a flash of red among the pines on the hill, saw his daughter waving to him, and drove on until he saw her waiting at the lower gate of the cemetery with the baby and a strange, foreign-looking woman whom he took to be a gypsy who had probably been carrying the baby away when Anna caught her. Again and again that night at home he exclaimed over his surprise to think that the old and faded woman with the piercing black eyes who might have been a gypsy crone was none other than the handsome Mr. Langley's wife. And yet he granted she was pleasant-spoken and the baby seemed to take to her amazingly and he only hoped she wasn't out of her head.

Anna got out with Mrs. Langley at the parsonage and asked her father to bring the baby in. Seth Miller held the baby close, whispering to him and lengthening the inconsiderable distance by crawling along, the while Anna explained that she would have to go in for a little and asked him to stop at Miss Penny's with the news and have some one come for her with the pony later.

"And pa, if you see Mr. Langley, send him home right away," she added eagerly. "Or—if you happen to hear where he is, do go get him and bring him home."

Seth Miller did not meet Mr. Langley, however, nor

could he learn where he was except that he wasn't in the Hollow. As a matter of fact Mr. Langley was engaged in an affair of some moment.

He had left the parsonage early in the afternoon. Directly after dinner, an informal, self-constituted committee of three men living in the Farleigh end of the village had waited on the minister in his study. Though not taken wholly by surprise, he had been shocked and distressed by the nature of their errand, even while he could not but feel, as he assured them, that they acted within their rights. He would have persuaded them to wait until after Christmas, but he could not insist upon it. And he was grateful to them for coming to him and allowing him to forestall their action so that it should be less shockingly abrupt to those who must suffer thereby.

Hastening from the parsonage, he met Rusty and Anna Miller in the phaeton driving the fat pony. As he had already seen Rusty, he only greeted them in passing. And realising at once that they were on their way to Wenham to meet Reuben, he was thankful to have them out of the way for a good measure of time. His business was with Alice Lorraine, and the fewer people he saw besides the girl herself, the quicker might he dispatch it.

Unhappily, he did not find Alice at home. He looked so concerned when Miss Penny told him that the girl had gone away for the afternoon that Mrs. Lorraine was startled.

"Is it something serious, Mr. Langley?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Lorraine, it is indeed. May I ask if it would be possible to get your daughter within half an hour?"

Mrs. Lorraine feared not. Miss Penny made an excuse and went out. As Mr. Langley resumed his chair, Mrs. Lorraine turned to him despairingly.

"I haven't the slightest idea where Alice is, Mr. Langley. She left the house an hour ago. Anna and Rusty Miller came over just as we were finishing dinner, and when we looked for Alice she was not to be found."

"May I ask if she went in the direction of Farleigh?"

"I hardly think she did, Mr. Langley. As a matter of fact, she practically always starts out in that direction, but I do not think she did to-day for if she had we should have seen her. Miss Penny and I both happened to be where we saw everyone who passed over that way for half an hour before we discovered she wasn't in the house."

"Then I shall have to trouble you, Mrs. Lorraine," he said gravely. "I am sorry. I would spare you if I could, but even if I had seen Miss Lorraine first, you would have had to know presently. May I ask you, in the first place, whether you have allowed anyone to occupy the cottage in the lane since you and your daughter have been at Miss Penny's?"

"O no, Mr. Langley," she declared so decisively that he frowned unconsciously. "We might as well have given it up, only Alice thought we should keep it until after Christmas. I suppose——"

But she could not go on. His expression disconcerted her.

"And the little building in the rear that is called the shop?" he asked.

"We never used that, anyhow,—never even looked into it, though I believe we have the key."

He picked up his gloves and looked inside as if to determine the size. Then he looked at her.

"Three men came to me this noon about a matter that has been troubling the village for some little time and which now seems to them to be approaching a crisis," he began. "This is the situation, Mrs. Lorraine. There has been a strange man around for—it must be upwards of three weeks now. One person and another has caught sight of him at night, and he seems to have looked into the windows of nearly every house in Farleigh. It may be imagination in some cases, but before I had heard anything about the stranger, I felt quite sure one night that there was someone peering in at my study window, and I certainly saw someone slink away from another window at the parsonage about a fortnight since. Someone saw the figure of a man pass across the window in the organ loft at the church one Sunday afternoon, and there have been other similar things—not of great moment when taken separately but which collectively seem to these men and others to constitute a menace to public safety."

"But Mr. Langley, what has that to do with my—

with the cottage in the lane?" she enquired with a sharp note of pain in her voice.

"They seem to think that the man has hidden there the while. Smoke has been seen a number of times coming from the chimney of the little shop. At first people explained it by saying that Miss Lorraine probably had gone down to fetch something and had made a fire to take off the chill, but lately one thing and another has led them to suspect that that isn't the right explanation."

"I have heard of tramps occupying deserted houses," she remarked.

He had nothing to say. She grew very white. "Did you ask for Alice simply to spare me, Mr. Langley?" she asked.

"No, Mrs. Lorraine," he replied reluctantly, "it was because I hoped she might be able to throw some light upon the matter. It appears almost certain that she knows something about this mystery in our midst. She has been seen more or less about the lane, and—I don't credit the particular rumor people have patched up, but——"

"And what is that, Mr. Langley?" she broke in breathlessly.

"They think Alice's father—that Mr. Lorraine is hereabout—that he has been staying in the shop behind the cottage and that his daughter carries him food and visits him daily."

For a few seconds, Mrs. Lorraine was too dazed to speak. Alice's strange conduct seemed to accord with

this tale, and yet—she rallied her forces. It was impossible.

"Alice hears from her father. She had a letter only a day or two ago," she declared. But even as she spoke, she realised that that wasn't valid evidence. She knit her brows, then looked up. "But Mr. Langley, if Mr. Lorraine had escaped, why wouldn't it have been in the papers?" she demanded. "You say this has been going on over three weeks, and—Mr. Lorraine was—well-known."

"I said something of the sort to these gentlemen," he returned. "They claimed that such an escape is often kept secret for a time for strategical reasons. But irrespective of that, there is no doubt that some one has been skulking about the village, and that your shop building has been occupied and probably by that person. But for more than a week everything was quiet. No smoke was seen and no one saw any suspicious person and it was decided that the mysterious stranger had departed. But night before last something happened to arouse suspicion again. The men who came to me declare that the tramp or stranger came back at that time and is still here. They say he is in your shop at this moment. The building is being watched now, and they are only awaiting my return to enter and arrest whomever they may find within."

He rose. "You know nothing about it, Mrs. Lorraine, but there's nothing to do but to allow them to proceed?"

"No. Mr. Langley, there isn't," she acknowledged,



The echoes of the thundering knocks had hardly died away . . .
when Alice Lorraine appeared.



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and asked him if he was going thither. And when he said that he was she asked if she might go along. He acquiesced. After she had spoken to Miss Penny, Mr. Langley handed her into the carriage and they drove to the lane where the minister gave the horse in charge to someone standing about. Going straight to the shop, they found the three men Mr. Langley had seen and the constable.

The latter pounded on the door preliminary to breaking it in. He waited a few seconds. The echoes of the thundering knocks had hardly died away when the door opened and Alice Lorraine appeared before the five men and her mother.

CHAPTER XXI

PUSHING by Alice Lorraine, deaf to her entreaties, the constable and two of the men made their way into the shop and after an hasty glance about the lower room hastened upstairs. Mr. Langley, after a brief word to Mrs. Lorraine, followed. And despite his haste and excitement and perturbation, he noticed the homelike appearance of the place he recollected as a littered work shop.

But of the upper chamber he noted no detail. As his head rose above the railing of the stair, he saw the men start back from the further end of the place. Peering into the shadows, he saw the figure of a man stretched upon an old couch. Approaching, he saw that he was burning with fever and unconscious. The man, who was very tall, was not at all the tramp in appearance, though he seemed to have slept in his clothes. He was well dressed and a superficial view pronounced him of refined presence. He was like a skeleton, however, and his purple face cadaverous to the extreme.

Mr. Langley asked one of the men to go for the doctor, sending Mrs. Lorraine up as he went. The constable said he would wait below. The other man

took a chair in the further end of the room as Mrs. Lorraine joined Mr. Langley by the couch.

"Do you know this man?" he asked.

"I never saw him in my life," she declared, and going to the stairs, summoned Alice. The girl appeared, white as chalk.

"Alice, do you know this man," demanded the mother sternly.

"I know him, certainly!" cried the girl defiantly. "He is—he is a gentleman. He has done no one any harm. He came to Farleigh to look for someone he knew once, and I told him he might stay here."

"But if he is a gentleman, how came you here, Alice Lorraine?" cried her mother.

"I haven't been here long, and—how could he know it! Look at him, will you!" the girl cried. But her mother continued to look sternly upon her.

"He went away," the girl forced herself to explain. "He was coming back before he went West where he lives now. He didn't come and—I was afraid something had—happened. I came down this afternoon to look once more and found him—just so. O Mr. Langley, is he dying, do you think?"

"I shouldn't judge so. I should say he was in the early stage of a fever. He is terribly emaciated. He looks starved. The doctor will be here shortly. Meantime let me see if I can loosen his clothing a bit."

As he bent over the couch, Alice's heart went out to him. He seemed so gentle and tender though he had no idea the man was not a stranger and probably believed him to be a tramp. As he put his arm beneath

the sick man's shoulders to change his position, the latter opened his eyes wide. Mr. Langley started but finished what he was about.

The doctor came up and Mrs. Lorraine and Alice went below. After some little time Mr. Langley joined them.

"It is probably pneumonia, or will be within a few hours, he announced. "Dr. Porter will send for the ambulance and have him taken to the hospital at Wenham where he will have the best of care."

He turned to Alice with a kind look.

"O mother, couldn't we take him into the cottage and take care of him?" cried the girl beseechingly. "He is good and—O, so unfortunate, and—O if you knew something I know, you couldn't refuse. And—if Mr. Langley knew—something else, he would beg you to."

Mr. Langley looked at the girl with an odd expression on his face.

"The man's eyes are exactly like those of a dear friend of mine who has been dead these six years," he said keeping his own eyes upon her the while. "For a moment I forgot all and thought he was Dick Cartwright."

Alice wrung her hands.

"Tell me, Alice Lorraine, who is the man above? Is it indeed Dick Cartwright?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Langley, it is," the girl owned with a great sense of relief. "He didn't die. It was another man, but he gave him his name because he wished to

be dead. He only came here to see you and Reuben. Then he was going back again. I—happened upon him one day and—after that I tried to help him. He is really——”

Mr. Langley was half way up the stair. Mrs. Lorraine stopped him. “Tell the doctor we will take him into the cottage,” she bade him. “Alice and I will go right over to get a bed ready.”

They got the bed ready and Mr. Langley and the doctor carried the sick man over, undressed him and got him into it. The doctor secured a nurse and Mr. Langley waited until she should come. Meanwhile Alice Lorraine related to him and to her mother the whole story Dick Cartwright had told her.

Mrs. Lorraine remained at the cottage, while Alice returned to Miss Penny’s. When Mr. Langley took her over he told Miss Penny briefly who the sick man was, and they discussed the situation as it concerned Reuben, who was fortunately out of the house at that moment.

They decided to say nothing to him until after Christmas when Mr. Langley would tell him the whole story. Reuben could then, if he wished, stay at the cottage for the remainder of his holidays.

As a matter of fact, Reuben was to remain there considerably longer than that. When it was time for him to return to college his father was just out of danger and Reuben did not dream of leaving him. He did not, indeed, return to college again until the following autumn. As soon as Dick Cartwright was able to be

about the house, Mrs. Lorraine returned to Miss Penny's, and Reuben and his father took the cottage as their home. Reuben got a position in the bank at Wenham and went back and forth to his work happily. His father kept house. As he grew stronger, Mr. Langley persuaded him to practice on the church organ. In the late spring, he was back again in his old position of organist at Farleigh church, and in the summer he secured, with Mr. Langley's help, the position to teach music in the public schools at Wenham. This gave him a sufficient income not only to live comfortably but to pay Reuben's expenses at college. Reuben, however, still preferred to work his way through, so the money was saved towards the pipe organ.

To return now to Mr. Langley and the day before Christmas—that Christmas which was to be the happiest of his life.

He hadn't realised that he was tired until he opened his own gate late that afternoon. Then suddenly such a dead weight of fatigue dropped down upon him that he felt as if he couldn't crawl to his own door. Certainly he could never attain the sanctuary of his study where he could think over the events of the afternoon and realise the joy that had come to him with the return of his friend as it were from the gates of death.

Someone came to the door and peered eagerly up

the street. It was Anna Miller. Forgetting himself, Mr. Langley called to her and hurried up the steps.

"O Anna, is anything wrong?" he asked anxiously, for he would have thought of her as being somewhere with Rusty and Reuben.

"Wrong!" the girl echoed with ringing voice and beaming face. "O Mr. Langley, everything is so beautifully right that it seemed as if you would never, never come. O hurry, please."

She led him, not as he expected, towards his wife's door, but into the front room across the passage from the study. It had been the parlour but was seldom used now-a-days.

It looked exceedingly cheerful now, but so would the cellar have looked to Mr. Langley had the potato-bin held the same group that he saw on the brocaded sofa. Mrs. Langley, bright and alert with flushed cheeks and not uncomely, despite Seth Miller's opinion, sat thereon with Joe, Junior, curled up beside her while Big Bell hung over them, trying now to make herself inconspicuous and really appearing to be twice her natural size.

As the minister paused on the threshold, his wife looked up and smiled. She had actually learned since noon to smile. Or it may be that she had recollected her old smile of twenty-odd years ago, for she looked to Russell Langley at that moment like the bride of his youth, or rather like little Ella May's mother.

"Russell, what do you think! Anna has offered us

this precious baby as a Christmas gift!" she cried eagerly. "Shall we accept?"

He put Anna into the most comfortable chair in the room and moved it close to the sofa. Then he seated himself the other side of the baby whom he bent to kiss. And little Joe repeated what no doubt seemed to him the pass-word for this household, "baa-baa!"

Mr. Langley turned eagerly to the girl.

"Do you mean it, Anna?" he asked with such a look in his eyes that Anna could not answer. But she nodded, smiling through tears.

He took the baby into his arms and caressed it.

"I can't—we can't begin to tell Anna how happy we shall be nor how grateful we are to her, can we Ella?" he said warmly.

"We'll certainly jump at the chance," Mrs. Langley rejoined, borrowing Anna's phraseology with such comical effect that they all laughed merrily. And little Joe smiled confidently into Anna's eyes.

THE END.

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